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THE GREAT DUKE

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Wellington

THE GREAT DUKE

BY

W. H. FITCHETT, B.A., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "HOW ENGLAND SAVED EUROPE"
"DEEDS THAT WON THE EMPIRE," ETC.

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PROEM

"Hereafter, when the present generations of men shall have become as remote as the early Greeks or the founders of Rome are to us, it may be found that, in the range of poetry there does not exist an epic, the foundations of which are better shaped for artistic purposes than the story of Wellington's struggle with Napoleon's power."—HAMLEY.

THE picture of Wellington which is most deeply impressed on the general imagination is that of a grey-haired, venerable figure, erect in spite of eighty years, riding through the London streets, with hand raised from time to time in soldierly acknowledgment of signs of respect. He was the oldest, as well as the most famous, soldier of his generation. Round "the good grey head that all men knew" it seemed as if unknown years of warlike experience—the dust and glory of innumerable battles—gathered. It is not easy to realise that Wellington was, in fact, almost the youngest of all the great soldiers of history, and that his active military career, when measured against that of most of his rivals in fame, was curiously brief. It closed in the dusk of that

wild sunset at Waterloo, when he turned the head of his tired horse and parted with Blucher on the road near La Belle Alliance, with the tumult and wreck of an overthrown army—the last of Napoleon's veterans—all about him. He was then only forty-six years of age, younger at the close of his career as a battle-leader than Marlborough was at the beginning of the campaigns which gave him fame. For Marlborough was fifty-four years of age when he won Blenheim; and Ramilies, Oudenarde, and Malplaquet were still years distant.

Wellington's active career as a soldier stretches, roughly, through twenty-four years; and when set in true perspective it falls naturally into three periods of eight years each. The first runs from 1787, when he was gazetted as an ensign in the 73rd, to his return from Holland in 1795. He had risen fast in regimental rank by family influence; but until he joined the Duke of York's army at Antwerp, in July 1794, he had never heard a shot fired in anger. He had mastered, however, with characteristic thoroughness the alphabet of the drill-ground. He knew how to administer and handle a regiment. In the campaign that followed, when commanding the scanty rear-guard of a defeated army, in slow retreat from Malines to Bremen, through a long and bitter winter, he learned what disaster teaches a soldier. As he himself put it, long afterwards, with a certain

accent of angry scorn, "I learned more by seeing our own faults, and the defects of our system, in the campaign in Holland, than anywhere else."

But his experiences in the Low Countries sickened Wellington of a soldier's career, and he was willing, at the end of the campaign, to exchange all his opportunities of fame in that stern field for a stool in a public office in Dublin.

Then follows the second period of eight years under Indian skies, from 1797 to 1805; and these were a real apprenticeship in the art of war on a great scale. Within a month of his landing in India, Wellesley—still only twenty-eight years of age—was organising an army for a campaign. Two years later he was in charge of one of the columns converging on Seringapatam, commanding the right wing of a force, on the Indian exaggerated scale, "covering," as he himself says, "sixteen square miles." Two years later he shattered the Mahratta power at Assaye.

His career in India was exactly the training which fitted him for the Peninsula. It was a training in diplomacy and administration, as well as in soldiership; a drill in the art of commanding troops diverse in race and speech and creed. Above all, it was rich in the tonic of great responsibilities.

Long afterwards, Wellington, in a conversation with Croker, put in order of value the knowledge

which goes to make a great captain: "One must understand," he says, "the mechanism and power of the individual soldier, then that of a company, or battalion, or brigade, and so on, before one can venture to group divisions or move an army." Many commanders miss success because they have not mastered what may be called the mechanics of their profession. They do not know the possibilities and limitations of the man in the ranks; they have not learned the secret of using their tools swiftly and skilfully. Wellington said of Moore, "He was as brave as his own sword; but he did not know what men could do or could not do." "He was not of my school," he added significantly.

Now, in his bitter watch on the Waal, splashing under winter storms in the mire of Dutch roads, and—later—in swift and exhausting marches under Indian suns, Wellington learned perfectly what the man in the ranks can do, and cannot do. He learned, in minutest detail, how to handle a company, a battalion, a brigade. He had attained the perfect mastery of his tools.

The third period of eight years takes in the Peninsula, and ends at Waterloo; and Wellington entered on that great and final stage in his career as a soldier equipped in a signal degree for his task, alike in mind and body and experience. But he was only forty-six when he heard the last

sullen gun fired in the last and greatest of his battles. Well-nigh another forty years—years of peace—had to pass before, "to the noise of the mourning of a mighty nation," England's greatest soldier was laid in the crypt of St. Paul's by the side of her greatest seaman.

The chapters which follow give, in substance, the history of these three periods, the whole forming symmetrical stages in the development, not only of a great soldier, but of a character of historic scale and impressiveness. They are, it may be added, progressive stages in a career crowded with achievements in battle unsurpassed, in many respects, in the history of war.

This is in no sense, it may be added, a formal and complete "Life" of Wellington. He lived thirty-seven years after Waterloo, and during all that period he was an active and most influential force in the national life. He was the foremost man in England. His fame, indeed, filled all lands. He was the counsellor of kings. His word made and unmade Ministries. Yet he can hardly be described as having a political career. He filled great political offices. He was a member of many Cabinets; once he was Prime Minister. Once, indeed, for ten days, he concentrated in his single person nearly every important post in the Cabinet. And he brought to his public life great qualities —scorn of falsehood, simplicity of character, in-

flexible loyalty to duty—not always found in that realm. He was, no doubt, an aristocrat to the tip of his fingers, with both the merits and the limitations of his type. In his political creed he was a convinced and obstinate Tory. He hated change. In a speech which he delivered in 1830, he described the old pre-reform House of Commons, built on a franchise which gave two members to an old wall at Gatton, and no member whatever to Manchester or Birmingham, as "yielding a legislature which answers all the useful ends of government to a greater degree than any legislature ever has done in any country whatever." He went on to say that, if he had the task of forming the legislature of any country, "he would not undertake to say that he could invent such a legislature as that Great Britain possessed, for the nature of man is incapable of reaching such excellence at once. But my great endeavour," he added, "would be to form some description of legislature which could reach the same results."

And yet he was the head of the Ministry which repealed the Test and Corporation Acts, and carried the Catholic Emancipation Act! The explanation is to be found in the circumstance that he had a political conscience, for which, in the last issue, the nation counted for more than the party. He was, in his own words, "the servant of the Crown and of the people." There

ran, indeed, through all his politics a fine strain of soldiership. He had "eaten the King's salt," and the King's Government must be carried on, whatever happened to the party.

But his training as a soldier, it may be frankly admitted, unfitted Wellington for political life of the Parliamentary type, with its ideal of government by debate; its spirit of compromise; its perpetual dance of "ins" and "outs." It specially unfitted him for British politics during the thirty years betwixt, say, 1819, the year of the "Manchester massacre," and of the Six Acts, and 1848, the year that saw the collapse of the Chartist agitation. That period was an era of political transition. New classes were coming into political existence; new ideas were taking shape; ancient habitudes were being cast off; national life was finding new expression. The very centre of authority in the State was being shifted.

Now, Wellington was, first and last, a soldier, familiar with camps and marches; and he had the limitations of the soldier. His ideal was not freedom, but discipline. He was accustomed, not to discuss, but to decide; not to persuade or convince, but to command. He exacted obedience, and he rendered it. "All I desire," he said, ". . . all I have desired for many years past is to see . . . the country *governed*." A good soldier's hate of disorder burns in those words. But a

soldier's very virtues unfit him for public life conducted on Parliamentary methods. That system needs other qualities and more pliant characters than the camp and the battlefield yield.

If Napoleon had died in the ranks of his Old Guard at Waterloo it would have been well for his memory. St. Helena was a very sordid postscript to Austerlitz and Wagram. In the history of the human intellect, what more tragical fall can be discovered than that which is offered by the spectacle of the brain which inspired the Code Napoleon, occupied in its last years in the invention of lying "memoirs," and in harrying poor Sir Hudson Lowe? And in that wild scene on the Brussels road, when, leaning from his horse in the darkness, Blucher threw his arms round Wellington's neck, and cried, "*Mein lieber kamarade*"—if at that moment a bullet from some retreating French soldier had ended Wellington's life he might have held, not perhaps a more enduring, but certainly a more picturesque and more absolutely unshadowed place in the memory of mankind. At least, he would have escaped the broken windows of Apsley House.

Wellington's career as a soldier, however, has the completeness of an epic. His story, from the ensigncy in the 73rd to the glory of Waterloo, moves with the speed, rises to the climax, and has the unity of an antique drama. And Wellington

stands amongst the great captains of history almost unique as a famous soldier, with none of the dangerous ambitions of a soldier. He explained in later years the secret of the trust he won, both in Portugal and Spain, by the fact that he was visibly *un conquérant sans ambition.* "All the world," he says, "knew that I desired nothing but to beat the French out of Spain, and then go home to my own country, leaving the Spaniards to manage theirs as they pleased."

It might almost be said, indeed, that he was not so much a soldier as a supreme workman, with a good workman's hate of waste, his delight in good instruments, his impatience of slovenly work, his passion for making his task complete. He was, above all things, whether in the camp or on the battlefield, a great citizen, "the servant of the Crown and people," to use his own phrase, and with no ambition in discord with loyalty to either. This is a career and a character worth studying.

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ARTHUR, FIRST DUKE OF WELLINGTON . . *Frontispiece*
(*From a painting by* GOYA.)
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PART I

THE TRAINING OF A SOLDIER

THE GREAT DUKE

CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS

"When Louis XVIII. was told that the same year which produced Napoleon also produced Wellington, he said Providence owed mankind that compensation. Kings have seldom infused such deep meaning into their compliments."

ON the career of Wellington as a soldier there lies a fame so splendid that every detail in it becomes of interest, and Wellington himself is set in a light which makes visible for all time every aspect of his character, and almost every wrinkle in his face. But a haze of what might almost be described as absurd uncertainties hangs about the beginning of his career.

Arthur Wesley—the name was changed later to Wellesley—was the fourth son of Garret Wesley, the first Earl of Mornington, born in 1769—the year of Napoleon's birth; but about the exact date and place of his birth there is a helpless conflict of authorities. His mother—whose testimony ought

to be final—said it took place on May 1 at Mornington House, 24 Merrion Street, Dublin. The nurse who attended her protested it took place at Dangan Castle, in Meath, on March 26. *Exshaw's Magazine* for May, 1769, gives the birthday as April 29; the *Freeman's Journal* of the period announces the birth as taking place on May 6. The parish register at St. Peter's, Dublin, records that "Isaac Mann, archdeacon, christened Arthur, son of the Earl and Countess of Mornington, on April 30"—the day before, according to his mother's testimony, he was born! It is probable that the change in the calendar had not yet been accepted by the ecclesiastical mind, and the parish register gives us the date according to the old style.

The Irish Parliament was once called upon to settle the date of Arthur Wesley's birth. He had been elected a member, and his election was challenged, on the ground that he was under age; but, as the petition was not pressed, the evidence which would have settled this point, and saved much expenditure of useless ink, was not heard. A whole volume has been written on this subject under the title of "Wellington, the Date and Place of His Birth," and the conclusion is reached that it took place on April 29, new style. Wellington, himself, always regarded May 1 as his birthday.

The family name of Wesley was changed to

what was held to be its original form, Wellesley, in 1798,[1] and Arthur Wesley's genius in soldiership is supposed to find some explanation in his Wellesley ancestry, for that line has an honourable record in war. But, as a matter of fact, he was a Wellesley only by name; there does not seem to have been a drop of Wellesley blood in his veins. A Garret Wesley, about 1728, finding himself childless, adopted Richard Colley, his wife's nephew, as his heir, on condition that he assumed the name and arms of Wellesley. This Garret Wesley, in search of a son denied to him by nature, showed excellent judgment. At some earlier date he had offered to adopt Charles Wesley, a son of the Epworth Parsonage, the brother of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church; and Charles Wesley has won a fame by his hymns almost as imperishable — if not as resounding — as that his brother won as a religious reformer. One choice, in a word, would have given Garret Wesley, as his heir, one of the greatest hymn-writers in English literature, the other choice put in the line of his descent the greatest soldier in British history.

The Colleys, the stock from which Arthur Wellesley sprang, were an English family, transplanted as early as the reign of Henry IV. to Ireland; and

[1] To escape the inconvenience of the use of two names, the Wellesley form is used in these pages up to the point when a peerage changed the name to Wellington.

in their case, as in that of many other English houses, the slow, if strong, Saxon nature seemed to catch a pulse of quicker genius from the Irish soil into which it struck its roots. The record of the house in statesmanship, in law, and in soldiership is honourable. The father of Arthur Wellesley, the first Earl of Mornington, it is true, showed no special gifts in any of these strenuous fields. He was a musician, and, as far as he has any fame apart from that his famous sons reflect upon him, he won it in the realm of music. Some of his compositions—glees such as "Here in Cool Grot," and "Come, Fairest Nymph"—are still to be heard in musical societies. The title of Doctor of Music was conferred upon him in 1764 by Trinity College, Dublin. But from this gentle father, who spent his days in the invention of musical concords, there sprung a very remarkable cluster of sons, who took part in stormy scenes, and made contributions of long-enduring value to British history.

The eldest son, Richard, would have shone in any circle. His face, with its aspect of refinement, its look of almost feminine charm—but with a scholar's eyes, set beneath a brow of power—is one of the most striking in the portrait gallery of his century. He is one of the three men who, by statesmanship and daring, built up the Indian Empire; and he had a touch of brilliancy which neither of his great compeers—Hastings nor Dalhousie—possessed.

In some intellectual qualities—in range of vision, and in the faculty for governing men—he is not unworthy to stand by his younger and more famous brother. The stately marble statue to his memory which stands in Government House at Calcutta was nobly earned.

The third son, William Wellesley-Pole, began his career in the Navy, took to politics later as a career, was Chief Secretary for Ireland, and held a seat in Lord Liverpool's Cabinet. Another son, Henry, afterwards Baron Cowley, served in the Army, went as secretary with his elder brother to India, and was ambassador, in turn, to Spain, Austria, and France. He was offered, and declined, the Governor-Generalship of India. When to these three records is added that of Wellington himself, it may be doubted whether, at that period, under any other roof in the three kingdoms, there was such a cluster of sons destined for great careers as that which, in the seventies of the eighteenth century, gathered round the household table at Dangan Castle, or at 24 Merrion Street, Dublin.

It may be added that all the Wellesleys had the art of living long. They possessed tough bodies as well as strong brains. Richard died at eighty-two years of age; William Wellesley-Pole lived to be eighty-two; Henry to be seventy-four; the great Duke himself died at eighty-three. When we remember that all these men bore the strain of great

affairs, that upon the Marquis of Wellesley and the Duke of Wellington, in particular, there was thrown a burden of tasks and of responsibilities such as few men have ever carried, and that each lived to extreme old age, it is clear that they must have possessed physical vigour of the finest sort. They may certainly be added to the list of examples which prove that hard work does not kill.

It cannot be said that the childhood of the future victor at Waterloo was very happy, or his youth rich in signs of promise. He had a loveless home, a broken school life, an imperfect education. When his father died he was not yet twelve years of age; his mother, a woman of high intelligence and strong will, may have given her son something of her strength of brain, but his childhood missed the most sweet and gracious influence that can touch a boy's nature—a mother's tenderness. Wellington was not in the least inclined to self-pity, but in his old age he said of himself, with a strange note of bitterness, "No woman ever loved me." And smaller men, over whose names Fame has never blown her trumpet, would not accept all the glory Wellington achieved if they had to pay for it the price of that tragical divorce from the tenderness of a woman's affection which Wellington declared to be his own lot.

The family history of the Wellesleys, as a matter of fact, does not always make edifying reading.

Both the Marquis of Wellesley and his more famous brother had unsatisfactory matrimonial experiences; but it is not easy to measure the loss Arthur Wellesley sustained when his childhood missed the touch of a mother's affection, with its swift intuitions, wiser than all male wisdom, its healing sympathy, its divine patience. His mother's feeling towards the son who was destined to cover the family name with glory was—if tradition is to be credited—not far removed from aversion. The slow, thick speech and dull manner of his early days offended her taste. "I vow to God," she exclaimed, "I do not know what I shall do with my ugly son Arthur." In her brusque, unguarded talk he was "the fool of the family." Her "ugly boy Arthur," she decided, was fit food for powder. And naturally, perhaps inevitably, the unloved boy, when he reached manhood, had little affection to give to an unloving mother.

It might perhaps be supposed that such a woman would be a fit mother for a great soldier. For war is a stern realm. One who is to win distinction in it ought to have in his nature a strain of hardness like steel. Arthur Wellesley's boyish character certainly escaped the enervation of tenderness. But love has wholesome—not to say ennobling—functions in the training of character, and Wellington to his dying day showed the scars left by the failure of his mother in affection. He was, says Greville, "a

hard man." Lord Roberts, the most generous of critics, who ranks Wellington as a war-captain higher even than Napoleon, describes him as "reserved, unsympathetic, perhaps a little selfish." It is the absence of the faculty for inspiring affection amongst his soldiers which makes Lord Wolseley deny to Wellington a place in the first rank of the world's soldiers.

On the other side, of course, must be remembered Napier's characteristic dedication of his immortal work to Wellington. "It is," he says, "because I have served under your lordship that I can understand what the soldiers of the 10th Legion felt for Cæsar." But Napier himself was a soldier of genius, and Wellington appealed to his intellect. He could hardly interpret the feeling of the man in the ranks. Wellington certainly inspired trust in his soldiers; but he had no spell to win their love. This was one of his visible limitations as a general.

Arthur Wellesley's education, again, was of a curiously planless and inadequate sort. His eldest brother was sent, in turn, to Harrow, Eton, and Oxford, and so acquired, and kept to the end of his days, a scholar's tastes and a scholar's ripeness of knowledge. He was passionately fond of literature, a constant student of Dante, a good Italian scholar, and in 1840 printed for private circulation a book of Latin verse. He had, in a word, the best education of his day.

Wellesley's education, on the other hand, is a chapter of careless and unfinished experiments. He was first sent to a preparatory school in Chelsea, where, according to his own account, he "learned nothing." For a short time he was at Eton, and in the grounds of the famous school there is still shown the spot where he fought with Bobus Smith, the brother of Sydney Smith—and won his first victory. As Bobus Smith tells the tale, he was caught bathing, and was pelted from the bank by young Wellesley. He threatened to get out and thrash his tormentor, who dared him to fulfil his threats. He got out, fought without dressing, and was defeated in three or four rounds.

Arthur Wellesley's reputation at Eton was that of an idle, dreamy, companionless lad. In 1784 Lady Mornington, whose means were straitened, removed to Brussels, and for a year Arthur received private lessons there from a French avocat, Mons. Goubert. In 1785, when his mother returned to England, he was sent to the French Academy at Angers. It was not, as is commonly supposed, a military school, and the victor of Waterloo owed nothing to French military training received there.

At Angers he was ailing and sickly, and according to Sir Alexander McKenzie, who was with him at the French school, "young Wellesley passed most of the time on a sofa, playing with a white terrier." In after years McKenzie was astonished at

the physical strength and endurance shown by Wellington, remembering, as he did, the ailing boy at Angers. "Ah," said the Duke, "that is due to India. India effected a total change in my constitution."[1]

The head of the school, however, was an accomplished engineer, M. Pignerol, and may be supposed to have strengthened the bias of young Wellesley towards mathematical subjects. In later years Wellington was accustomed to say that his special intellectual gift was one for quick and accurate calculation, and if circumstances had not made him a soldier he might have distinguished himself in the realm of finance.

This is not a shining record, and when, late in 1786, a lad of seventeen, Arthur Wellesley left Angers, and in a broken *cabriolet de poste* drove through the streets of Paris on his way homeward, and put up at "a mean sort of inn near the Palais Royal," he was as poorly equipped in the matter of education—except for his knowledge of the French language—as any younger son of a noble house in Great Britain. His single accomplishment was the power to play the violin; his single pronounced taste a delight in music; and neither the accomplishment nor the taste pointed in the direction of a soldier's career, or could be accepted as a sign

[1] "Reminiscences of the Duke of Wellington," by the Earl of Ellesmere, p. 102.

of martial qualities. In India, in fact, Wellesley burned his violin, and never touched one in after life, as he held the practice of playing the fiddle to be incompatible with a soldier's business. To the end of his days, however, his delight in music, a legacy from his musical father, survived.

CHAPTER II

BEGINNING SOLDIERSHIP

"Unless a man works he cannot find out what he is able to do."

A CAREER had to be found for this plain-looking, shy and awkward boy. In 1786 his eldest brother wrote to the Duke of Rutland, then Viceroy of Ireland, "Let me remind you of a younger brother of mine. . . . He is here at this moment and perfectly idle. It is a matter of indifference to me what commission he gets, provided he gets one soon." A commission in the artillery was offered, but refused. On March 7, 1787, Arthur Wellesley, not yet eighteen years of age, was gazetted to an ensigncy in the 73rd Foot, a Highland Regiment. His whole professional career, as measured by the list of his exchanges and commissions, may be compressed into a dozen lines:

Ensign, 73rd Foot, March 7, 1787.
Lieutenant, 76th Foot, December 25, 1787.
Lieutenant, 41st Foot, January 23, 1788.
Lieutenant, 12th Light Dragoons, June 25, 1789.
Captain, 58th Foot, June 30, 1791.
Captain, 18th Light Dragoons, October 31, 1792.

Major, 33rd Foot, April 30, 1793.
Lieutenant-Colonel, 33rd Foot, September 30, 1793.
Colonel (brevet), May 3, 1796.
Brigadier-General, July 17, 1801.
Major-General, April 29, 1802.
Lieutenant-General, April 25, 1808.
General, July 31, 1811.
Field-Marshal, June 21, 1813.

A glance down that list shows that his name, at least, appeared on the roll of many regiments, and that his rise was curiously rapid. He held a commission for a year and a half in infantry regiments, then for two years in the 12th Light Dragoons. For a little over a year he was again in an infantry regiment—the 58th—then for nearly a year in the 18th Light Dragoons. He had no experience in artillery; while his great opponent, Napoleon, was an artillery officer only; and this fact perhaps helps to explain the different use both these great soldiers made of their guns. Napoleon was accustomed to make a formidable use of his artillery in attack. He would concentrate an overwhelming gun-fire on the point in the enemy's line on which he was about to leap; pulverise it, so to speak—and then launch his columns at it. Wellington, as a rule, either in defence or attack, scattered his guns along his whole front, and used them only as an auxiliary to his infantry fire.

Arthur Wellesley's advance in regimental rank might well, for its speed, move the envy of all

soldiers to-day. After only seven months' service as an ensign, he became lieutenant; he was captain some three years later; became major when not yet twenty-four years of age, and lieutenant-colonel by purchase—the money being advanced by his eldest brother—when he had been only six years in the army, was hardly twenty-five years of age, and had not seen a shot fired in battle.

To what did he owe that swift, unbroken rise? He had seen no service, won no distinctions, and given no sign of military qualities. The secret lies in the influence of his eldest brother, who was the friend of Pitt, had a seat in the House of Commons, and held office as one of the Lords of the Treasury. He had just been appointed by Pitt, indeed, a member of the Board of Control for Indian Affairs, and was in the innermost circle of political life.

It was an age when influence was supreme in army affairs, and there are examples of military promotion in that period which are even swifter, and have much less justification in reason than that of Arthur Wellesley. Pakenham, afterwards Wellington's brother-in-law, was a major at seventeen, and a lieutenant-colonel at eighteen. Colville had his first commission as a boy of eleven, and was a captain when twenty-one. Stapleton Cotton was lieutenant at seventeen, and lieutenant-colonel of a cavalry regiment at twenty-one.

Family influence, again, in 1787—when he was only eighteen years of age—won young Wellesley the post of A.D.C. to the Lord Lieutenant, and he held that post till March, 1793. It was a bad school for a young soldier—idle, extravagant, frivolous, and not too pure. An A.D.C. to the Lord Lieutenant, not nineteen years old, and with an income of only £125 a year, was plainly exposed to many risks. But if Wellington's assertions in later years—in spite of some well-known stories—may be trusted, he at least showed one surprising virtue: he kept out of debt!

In April, 1790, when twenty-one years of age, he was elected a member of the Irish House of Commons for Trim, a family seat, and held it till the dissolution in June, 1795. He possessed neither then, nor at any other time, the gifts of an orator. Sir William Fraser says[1] that his tongue was too large for his mouth; and Wellington in after years remedied this defect "by placing the point of his tongue as low down as possible in his mouth." This gave his voice a peculiar, cavernous sound. It is certain that during his five years in the Irish House of Commons Wellesley won no fame as a debater or an orator.

But to this stage of his career belongs almost the one gleam of tender sentiment discoverable in it. The vice-regal court was gay and brilliant, and

[1] "Words of Wellington," p. 112.

one of its beauties was Catharine Pakenham, the third daughter of Lord Longford. Arthur Wellesley fell in love with her, and was accepted; but the prospective bride had no dower, and a youthful A.D.C. could not marry on £125 a year. Marriage was plainly impossible, and the lovers—it may be doubted whether, on either side, the flame was very ardent—separated, with a vague understanding that in later years, and under happier circumstances, they might be united.

Gibbon, the historian, it will be remembered, tells how, finding himself under very similar circumstances forbidden by parental authority to marry, he "sighed as a lover, but obeyed as a son"; and cynics ever since have argued that, whatever may have been the quality of his filial piety, his love was of a very tepid character. Arthur Wellesley resigned his love—as he returned to it again ten years later—with a dry commonsense which seems to show that his affection for Catharine Pakenham much resembled, in temperature, that of Gibbon for Susanne Curchod.

Up to this point neither the performances nor the prospects of the young soldier can be described as brilliant. His story, indeed, is a catalogue of failures. He had been an unloved son, an undistinguished school-boy, a silent member of Parliament, a disappointed lover, a soldier who had been pushed through many stages of promotion by family in-

fluence, but who had never seen a shot fired in anger, and whom nobody suspected of possessing any military qualities. And yet already there were some features in Wellesley's character that gave promise of a successful career.

As a matter of fact, from the first Wellesley took his profession as a soldier seriously. He once told Croker that, within a few days of his joining the 73rd as ensign, he had one of the privates weighed, first in his clothes only, and then in heavy marching order, in order to ascertain what was expected of a soldier on service. Croker observed that this was remarkable forethought in so young a man. "Why," replied the Duke, "I was not so young as not to know that since I had undertaken a profession I had better try to understand it."

When he became major of the 33rd, all the latent, practical energy of his nature awoke. "I believe," he said in later years, "that I owe most of my success to the attention I always paid to the inferior part of tactics as a regimental officer. There were very few men in the army who knew these details better than I did; it is the foundation of all military knowledge. When you are sure that you know the power of your tools, and the way to handle them, you are able to give your mind altogether to the greater considerations which the presence of the enemy forces on you."[1]

[1] Croker, vol. i. p. 337.

That story, and the comments upon it, really supply the key to one part, at least, of Wellington's surpassing gifts as a war-captain. Squadrons, battalions, regiments, divisions are the pieces with which a commander has to play on the chess-board of the battlefield the iron game of war; and what player can escape defeat who does not know how to handle his pieces? Wellington is prosaic; his regiment was "the tool" with which he had to work; his hand must be familiar with it; but the mastery of his "tools" which he thus early attained served him magnificently. No great captain ever excelled him in the facility with which he could move the forces under his command. An army—horse, foot, and artillery—was for him exactly what a rapier is in the hands of a skilful fencer. And that touch of weighing a private with, and without, his marching equipment showed that from the outset he realised how much of the success of great campaigns depended on the endurance and strength of the men in the ranks.

He never lost sight of what may be called the physical side of warfare—the value of the commissariat, the necessity for caring for the food, the clothes, the health—the very boots—of the men in the ranks. Many years afterwards, telling the story of his Indian campaigns, he said, "If I had rice and bullocks I had men, and if I had

men I knew I could beat the enemy." "Rice and bullocks" do not sound very formidable items in a list of the appliances of war; and yet everything else, from the brains of the general to the thunder of the artillery, and the charge of the bayonet-line, go for little if "rice and bullocks"—or what they represent—are neglected.

Another side of Arthur Wellesley's character, too, was energetically, if silently, developed at this period. He told Shaw Kennedy, in later years, that "he had always made it a rule to study for some hours by himself every day"; and it is plain that this habit dates from the time when he was a youthful A.D.C. in Dublin. And "study" for him meant writing as well as reading. It meant the concentrated application of his mind to the mastery of one field of knowledge after another. The lines on which he studied, too, were determined by his profession as a soldier, and by his place in the Irish House of Commons, and these two impulses were not discordant. One assisted the other. One of the most striking features of Wellington's character as a general is the care with which he always took political forces into account in the campaign he was conducting; and alike in India and in Spain he had to be a statesman as well as a soldier—sometimes, indeed, almost more than a soldier.

That resolute habit of solitary study—the re-

demption of a given number of hours every day from society and pleasure, the concentration of a powerful intellect and an unforgetting memory on wisely selected topics—enriched Wellesley's mind to a degree it is difficult to measure. It gave him that power of intense and concentrated attention—the faculty for dismissing all other subjects for the moment, and bringing all his faculties to bear on the single matter in hand—which served him so splendidly throughout his career. Perhaps no other youthful soldier at that moment in the British army gave so many hours of solitary study every day to the literature of his profession and the knowledge of affairs as did the future victor of Waterloo.

CHAPTER III

THE LEAGUE AGAINST THE REVOLUTION

"The sword is drawn, the scabbard thrown away. It is even as Danton said in one of his all too gigantic figures, 'The coalesced Kings threaten us, we hurl at their feet as gage of battle the Head of a King.'"—CARLYLE.

IT is not difficult to guess the forces which stirred the deeper nature of Arthur Wellesley, and made him turn from the frivolities of the vice-regal court, the parish politics of the constituency of Trim, and the corrupt intrigues of the Irish Parliament, to solitary study. He never shone as a politician; but his whole career proves that he had the wide vision, the power of discerning the course, and assessing the energy, of great movements, which is the mark of the statesman. And, at that particular moment, the very air of the world was shaken with the greatest event in modern history—the French Revolution. The mere comparison of dates is curiously suggestive. In 1789, the year of the storming of the Bastille, Arthur Wellesley was still a lieutenant in the 12th Light Dragoons. He was a captain in the

18th when France was proclaimed a republic and Louis XVI. was beheaded. The same months witnessed the dawn of the National Convention, and the issuing of the Edict of Fraternity. How could a young soldier, who, as after events showed, possessed an intellect capable of measuring these strange forces, and was destined by fate to play a supreme part in the mighty drama just beginning, be unstirred by such events? They must have quickened every pulse in his blood.

The French Revolution, it will be remembered, broke on the world in its earliest stage like a dawn in summer skies. It represented the disappearance of a social and political order of things on which the human reason had long pronounced sentence, and which the patience of mankind at last found intolerable. France was only doing at the end of the eighteenth century, and doing to the sound of flutes, what England had done in the seventeenth century, and done to the clash of armed hosts. In this later and happier revolution across the Channel, Englishmen persuaded themselves there was to be no Cromwell, and nothing to correspond with that tragic scene outside the banqueting chamber in Whitehall, when a king's head fell under the stroke of the axe. The wisest heads in Great Britain imagined they saw the dawn of a new heaven breaking upon a new earth. Fox, it will be remembered, described the storming of

the Bastille as "the greatest event that has happened in the world—and the best." Even Pitt, from the opposite pole of political opinion, declared in 1790 that "the present convulsions in France must sooner or later culminate in general harmony, and then France will stand forth as one of the most brilliant nations in Europe."

But revolutions in general, and French revolutions in particular, run fast, and in their later stages they not seldom run in directions which their authors neither contemplated nor desired. The States-General vanished, and a sterner shape—the National Assembly—took its place. This was pushed aside in turn by still wilder forces, the Jacobins and the Convention. There crept into French politics in the eighteenth century more than a strain of the ferocity of the Jacquerie of the fourteenth century. Then came the September massacres, the execution of the Royal Family, the Terror. The great Powers of Europe, as they watched the scene, felt as a number of fat burghers might, who watched from their front doors a powder-magazine taking fire in the next street.

Austria and Prussia joined in a league to suppress the Revolution; huge armies gathered on the Meuse; France was to be invaded. Then came the proclamation of the Republic and the execution of Louis XVI., his head—the severed head of a king—was hurled, in Danton's oft-quoted

phrase, "as a gage at the feet of the coalesced kings of Europe." The famous Edict of Fraternity followed, in which revolutionary France undertook to thrust its version of liberty on all European nations by the argument of the sword. "All governments," ran the Edict itself, "are our enemies; all people are our friends." It was a proclamation of universal war. "The success of our Government," said St. Just, "means the overthrow of all others." Republican France undertook to create about itself a girdle of sister republics. One clause in the Edict of Fraternity proclaimed that France "would treat as enemies of the people all who refused or renounced liberty and equality." Clearly war was inevitable. France was flinging herself like a shrieking Mænad on Europe.

The National Convention declared war with England on February 1, 1793; the answering declaration by England was published, as if with hesitating reluctance, on February 11, ten days later. All the advantages were on the side of revolutionary France. Ideas are sometimes more formidable weapons than bayonets, and France was armed with terrible ideas. Its politics won for it allies amongst the people of every land. Its armies had the fervours of the Revolution in their very blood; and, as always happens in a nation lifted into some high mood of passion, leaders were thrown up—alike in administration and on the battlefield—of

new daring and energy. The best marshals of Napoleon—Victor, Lannes, Masséna, Suchet—are to be found amongst the soldiers of the Revolution. The Committee of Public Safety had many detestable qualities, and, set in the dry light of history, is seen to be one of the most hateful forms that despotism ever assumed. But, at least, it had the functions of a nerve-centre—or of a flame-centre—for the energies of revolutionary France. It gave to all its armies a fire and an enterprise hitherto almost unknown in European war.

The forces arrayed against France, from Bayonne to Calais, ought to have ensured success by their mere scale; and up to a certain point they *did* succeed, until nearly all the frontier fortresses of France were in the hands of her enemies. The British flag flew above Toulon; Brunswick, with an army of 130,000, was within 160 miles of Paris. But the allies failed, not merely broken by the fury of French armies, led by such generals as Pichegru and Hoche and Jourdan, but because they turned aside to the pursuit of selfish ends. They wanted to dismember France, and to divide Poland, even more than to restore the Bourbons, or to put down the Revolution. Great Britain herself aimed to recover Dunkirk, the great naval arsenal which commanded the Channel, and the Duke of York, with 35,000 men, marched north to besiege that fortress.

No wonder that, led by incapable generals, paralysed by divided counsels, and seeking selfish and divided ends, the allies suffered defeat. The English failed at Dunkirk, and were driven out of Toulon. French armies overran the Rhine provinces, and began to press the British and the Austrians out of the Low Countries. The Duke of York, who commanded the English forces, was steadily driven back, and early in 1794 Lord Moira was despatched, with the 33rd Foot as part of his force, to reinforce him.

Some months earlier Wellesley, in his anxiety to join an expedition being organised for foreign service, had written to his brother, begging him to "ask Mr. Pitt to desire Lord Westmoreland to send me as major to one of the flank corps. If they are to go abroad," he wrote, "they will be obliged to take officers from the line, and they may as well take me as anybody else. I think it both dangerous and improper," he added, "to remove any part of the army from this country at present"—words which are a curious proof that, even at this early age, he had a vision of the general landscape; "but, if any part of it is to be moved, I should like to go with it, and have no chance of seeing service except with the flank corps, as the regiment I have got into as major is the last for service." That request did not succeed; but now the 33rd

itself was to form part of Lord Moira's force and Wellesley naturally went with it.

It was in May, 1794, that Wellesley, who had become a lieutenant-colonel in the previous September, sailed in command of the 33rd from Cork, as part of the force despatched to strengthen the Duke of York. He returned to England in March, 1795, his first campaign thus lasting about ten months. His biographers, with hardly an exception, pass over this stage in his career in the briefest possible manner, and plainly regard it as a meaningless prelude to his real career, deserving only to be forgotten. It is true that the campaign itself is a page in a very ignoble history, and one which the human memory would gladly forget. And yet, regarded as a stage in Wellesley's evolution as a great war-captain, no other period is more fruitful than these particular ten months. It was a training in disaster, and seldom disaster is richer in instruction to a young soldier than even victory. When some one compared Moltke with the great war captains of history, he, with equal modesty and truth, objected: "I have never," he said, "conducted a retreat." Wellesley's career as a soldier ended with one retreat — that from Quatre Bras to Waterloo; it began with another, from Malines across Holland and North Germany to Bremen; but that earlier retreat had no Waterloo at its close.

In the distance covered, and in length of time —as well as in hardship and suffering—this retreat exceeds that of Moore at Corunna. Moore's retreat lasted only eighteen days, four of the eighteen being occupied by a halt. The distance in a direct line was only 160 miles. The retreat of the British troops from Malines to Bremen was, in an air-line, some 200 miles; in time it stretched—with long pauses, it is true—through ten months. In severity of climate it exceeds that under which Moore's regiments went to pieces. There was no stern divisional general like Craufurd to hold the rear-guard together; no brilliant cavalry leader like Paget to shatter again and again the enemy's pursuing horsemen; and no high-minded soldier like Moore to act as an inspiration for the whole army. Above all, there was no Corunna—a flash of sudden, brilliant, and all-compensating victory—at the end of it.

No sterner school for a young soldier than those ten months of hunger and cold and hardship, of broken roads and exhausting marches, of divided leadership, and of a bankrupt commissariat—with a hostile population on every side, and an enterprising enemy in the rear—can easily be imagined. The army of Flanders which harboured Corporal Trim in its ranks lives in human memory largely by the energy and diligence with which it swore; and in 1794-5 the swearing of our unfortunate

soldiers, as they splashed through Dutch swamps, or shivered, hungry and ill-clad, on guard by frozen canals, with generals they despised and allies they mistrusted, must have been loud and deep, as well as constant.

The mere incidents of the campaign are scarcely worth relating, for they are marked by the shock of no great battle, and no gleams of generalship are discoverable in them. There was plenty of courage, of course, in the ranks; and, whenever it came to plain fighting, the British private showed himself worthy of the stock from which he sprang. If any one desires to know why the word "Lincelles" appears on the brigade colours of the Guards, and why a tune so French, and so revolutionary, as the "Ça ira" is the regimental march of the 14th, he must turn back to the dim records of this campaign. In all the cavalry performances of the British army, again, there is perhaps nothing more dashing and completely successful than the charge of the 15th Light Dragoons at Villers en Couche.

But the allied armies in the Netherlands were doomed to defeat by the double curse of divided aims and inert leadership. They had against them, it is true, only the ragged, ill-fed, half-disciplined soldiers of the Revolution. But the Revolution not only kindled a new fire in the blood of its soldiers, it gave them daring leaders, and taught

them an audacious strategy. It is true that the generals were controlled by politicians, and French politics were at that period of changeful, if very strenuous, quality. This explains why French strategy had wide gaps of mere slumber, and why it took ten months to drive the British troops, even under the Duke of York and his successors, to their ships at Bremen. But strategy on the French side had also volcanic bursts of energy, as in the famous winter campaign of 1794, when the touch of frost had turned canals and rivers into ribbons of glittering ice, and Pichegru led his ragged troops in tireless marches across the whole landscape, and captured ships with his dragoons.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE NETHERLANDS

"There is no education like adversity."—DISRAELI.

WHEN Lord Moira landed with his contingent at Ostend, the allies were in steady retreat along the Scheldt, but were clinging, for the moment, to Antwerp as a base. Moira was eager to join the Duke of York at Malines, and pushed towards that place along the great canal with the main body of his force—a perilous movement, since it was a march across the French front. Wellesley—who, being the senior colonel, was in command of a brigade of 3000 men, consisting of his own regiment, the 33rd, and two Highland regiments—was left to settle matters at Ostend, and follow his chief. Here was a young soldier, who had never seen a shot fired in war, in command of a brigade, with an enterprising enemy on his flank.

Wellesley judged, with sure insight, that the sea route was both quicker and safer than that by land. And he showed here, at the very first challenge of responsibility, that essential quality of a good soldier—confidence in his own judgment.

He embarked his brigade, sailed round by sea, and up the Scheldt, and in this way reached the Duke of York before his general.

The allied forces were driven steadily back on their base at Antwerp; but, French energy just then suffering from a cold fit, they were able to cling to that city till September. Then they were forced to fall back in turn to Breda and to Bois le Duc, abandoning Belgium. The French tried to cut the allied forces from the line of the Meuse, and seized Boxtel, their most advanced post, thus turning the right flank of the Duke of York, and making his position untenable. The Duke put two battalions of the Guards, a dragoon regiment, with the 33rd and the 44th, under Abercrombie, and directed him to retake the village. The force started, but the Guards and cavalry in advance fell into a trap, a masked battery opened a sudden and destructive fire upon them, and they fell back, sharply pressed by the French. Caught in a narrow lane, they lost their formation, and the French, never so dangerous as when the fierce wine of victory is in their blood, came on at a run. A serious disaster was in sight.

Wellesley, who commanded the rear-guard, here had his first vision of actual battle, and it was one which might well have shaken the nerves of an older soldier. He saw—that rarest of spectacles!—the Guards in retreat, a broken mass, with the British cavalry riding disorganised amongst them.

The best regiments in the British army, in a word, were, for the moment, turned into a mob—and the French were coming on exultantly in pursuit! But Wellesley was equal to the sudden crisis. He both kept his own coolness and held his regiment steady. He did even more—he handled it with a touch of soldierly genius. He swung back the central files of his line, let the broken tumult of Guards and cavalry sweep through, then swiftly re-forming his front, he checked and shattered the pursuing French with steady volleys. It was a feat of arms worthy of a veteran, and in a soldier so young was a proof of great qualities.

The British still fell sullenly back. Winter lay on the naked, unsheltered landscape, the most bitter winter known for years; but there was no rest for the retreating columns. The frozen soil, with rivers and canals congealed into solid ice, made rapid movement possible, and the French, under Pichegru's fierce leadership, drove the allies from their cantonments on the Meuse to the Waal. Here there was a pause in the campaign, and for four months—till January, 1804—the allied troops clung to that line.

Wellesley was left in command of the rear-guard, a fact which shows the reputation he had already won. The British headquarters were at Arnheim, twenty-five miles distant, and he was cast on his own resources. The conditions were trying. A weak rear-guard, an alert foe, bitter weather, a

hostile population, a bankrupt commissariat, and helpless generals. During that whole period, Wellesley records, he "only saw a general officer once."

He was only twenty-five; but he had already begun to learn for himself the secret of good leadership. "I was always on the spot," he says. "I saw everything, and did everything for myself." "We turn out," he wrote at the time, "once, sometimes twice, every night; officers and men are harassed to death; and if we are not relieved, there will be very few of the latter remaining shortly. I have not had the clothes off my back for a long time, and generally spend the greater part of each night on the bank of the river."

Here, at this early period, is that note of relentless thoroughness which ran through Wellesley's whole record as a soldier, and is one of his best titles to fame. At headquarters, amongst his elderly generals, there was nodding sloth and the drowsy neglect of all duty. But this youthful colonel of the 33rd, with his lean body, his hawk-like nose, his steadfast blue eyes, his blunt fashion of speech, "saw everything and did everything" for himself. He was, to use his own phrase, "always on the spot," and was more vigilant than his own sentries. In his later years he was known as "the Iron Duke," but there was a strain as of iron in his conception of duty long before he became a Duke.

Where did he learn that stern, tireless, unsparing habit of thoroughness? Not in his untaught boyhood; not as a purely decorative aide-de-camp at the vice-regal court; not while yawning through the debates in the Irish Parliament. It was in his very blood. It was part of his genius as a soldier. And for any soldier it is almost a better gift than genius itself.

The Duke of York, meanwhile, had been recalled to England, and Count Walmoden, a Hanoverian, was in command. It was still dreadful weather, but on January 16 the British columns had to begin their retreat afresh. The roads were broken, the days were short, the skies were black with incessant storms. The commissariat, always inefficient, broke down; there was practically no medical department. The sick were packed in waggons without cover, and died in scores of mere cold. After a retreat of eleven days a brief stand was made at Deventer, but two days later the retreat began afresh. The wasted and suffering columns at last reached Bremen, and the survivors embarked for England. No one gathered laurels in that loitering, desperate, and ignoble campaign.

Yet the campaign itself, as the opening chapter in Wellesley's career as a soldier, has some notable features. His first campaign was on the same field as his last, and against the same foes. When he marched the 33rd into the British lines at Malines

he was little more than twenty miles from Waterloo. Only twenty miles—and twenty years—separated him from that "first and last of fights"! Napoleon, his great rival, was at that moment a young artillery officer fresh from Toulon. How much, not only for Wellesley and Napoleon, but Europe and the world, lay hidden in those brief twenty years!

Wellesley's first sight of battle, again, showed exactly the spectacle he was to see repeated on half a hundred battlefields. It was a vision of the faces of the charging French, and, drawn across the heads of the attacking columns, a thin line of steadfast British infantry. It was a picture in little of whole campaigns.

All the characteristics of Wellesley's genius as a soldier are really visible in this ignoble campaign; and the experiences thus acquired were exactly fitted to draw that genius into action, and equip it with practical knowledge. That stern watch of four months on the Waal, the command of the rear-guard of a retreating army, the bleak natural conditions, the perplexities born of association with foreign allies, and of dealing with a hostile population—all this was an education in vigilance, in resource, in hardihood. Wellesley's first act of independent command, indeed—his choice of the sea route from Ostend to Malines—was significant. It illustrates his gift for seeing the landscape, for estimating distances, and solving the problem of

reaching a critical point in the shortest possible time, and with the least risk—all essential elements in generalship. It showed, too, the coolness with which he could form his own judgment, and the courage with which he could act on it.

His first fight, again, in the lane at Boxtel was characteristic. An untried soldier, in command of a young regiment—that sudden vision of the picked regiments of the British army tumbling back, broken and disordered, on his front, might well have proved too much for his coolness. But Wellesley showed at that moment, what to the end of his career was one of his most characteristic gifts as a soldier, the power of swiftly handling troops. To swing back the centre of his own line, let the rush of broken troops through, and instantly re-form his front, was a cool and fine bit of tactics. It was exactly—though on a smaller scale—what, fourteen years afterwards, saved the battle at Talavera. Some of the most brilliant incidents in British warfare are supplied by exactly such examples of the swift, cool, deadly handling of a regiment, as though it were a sword, which Wellesley showed at Boxtel. Colborne's employment of the 52nd, at Waterloo, is such an incident. Colin Campbell's use of his Highlanders at Balaclava, again, when he swung back one half of his slender line to meet the charge of the Russian cavalry, was a movement which to those who

watched it from the hill-top near, seemed exactly like the rapier play of a clever swordsman — a supreme example of the sure, swift, and effective handling of a regiment in the presence of a sudden peril. And Wellesley's use of the 33rd in the lane at Boxtel deserves to be classed with these.

Throughout the campaign the failure in generalship on the part of the allies was nothing less than wonderful. A list of the performances of their commanders, if drawn up in detail, would be a very complete catalogue of all the military faults a good soldier ought to avoid. "It was a marvel," said Wellington himself afterwards, "that any of us escaped. No one knew anything of the management of an army. A fellow called Hammerstein, who was considered the chief authority in the army on tactics, was quite an impostor." If the Commander-in-Chief was at dinner when important despatches arrived, the despatches—and not the dinner—had to wait. They had not seldom to wait till next day to be read.

This was a school which might well have ruined a young soldier. But for Wellesley, with his native, but as yet unsuspected, talent for war, these were exactly the conditions which drew out all his powers. As he kept his dogged and lonely watch on the Waal, this lad, scarcely twenty-five years old—and who only a few weeks before had been a purely decorative A.D.C. in Dublin—was as almost

as entirely cast on his own resources as he was fifteen years afterwards at Torres Vedras. On his frozen guard through black nights and stormy days, and for dreary months, he had to think, and resolve, and act for himself.

He was asked long afterwards if his experiences in the Dutch campaign had been of service to him. "Why," he replied, "I learned what one ought not to do, and that is always something." It is at least one half of the secret of successful generalship.

When the much enduring British divisions reached Bremen, Wellesley sailed in advance of his regiment to Ireland, and one of his earliest acts was to consult with his eldest brother as to whether he should not give up the army. With a failure of insight which, in a man so able, was nothing less than wonderful, his clever brother advised the future victor of Waterloo to apply for a post in the Revenue, or on the Treasury Board. Wellesley's letter to Lord Camden, who was now Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, is written in a curiously humble tone. "Considering," it ran, "the persons who are at present on those boards, and those who, it is said, are forthwith to be appointed, I hope I shall not be supposed to place myself too high in desiring to be taken into consideration."

His application for a civil, instead of a military, office is, he admits, "certainly a departure from the line which I prefer"; "but," he added, with a

certain touch of bitterness surprising in a soldier whose own promotion had been so rapid, "I see the manner in which military offices are filled, and I do not wish to ask for that which I know you cannot give me." And at the moment he made this application, and a chair in an office under the Revenue Board in Dublin seemed to fill the whole horizon of his ambition, Waterloo was only twenty years distant! The incident suggests a new commentary on the vanity of human wishes.

Wellesley, it may be suspected, was intellectually disgusted by the folly he had witnessed in high command through the campaign just ended. How could any sane man be content with a service in which drones commanded armies, and fools determined the strategy of a campaign? Wellesley's application for a place on the Revenue Board failed —greatly to the advantage of the world at large. But it is interesting to think how the whole course of history might have been deflected if Wellington—instead of smiting down Napoleon's marshals, one after the other, on the great stage of the Peninsula, and overthrowing Napoleon himself in the final struggle at Waterloo—had been keeping distillery accounts in some little room in Dublin.

PART II

UNDER INDIAN SKIES

CHAPTER I

A NEW FIELD

"It is impossible to believe that the climate of the Ganges Valley gave him suddenly a great intellect, a piercing insight, a matured judgment, and the power of steady application. . . . The man did not change, but he found more arduous work to be done." —HOOPER.

ARTHUR WELLESLEY'S application for civil employment apparently did not even produce an answer. He remained in command of the 33rd, and late in 1795 the regiment received orders to join the expedition against the French colonies in the West Indies, just then on foot.

It was an ill-planned and ill-fated adventure. The squadron set sail in October, was whipped with furious gales in the Channel for weeks, and finally driven back, with half its transports dismasted, and no less than seven totally wrecked. The whole expedition was worthy of the administration which, later, gave to British history the tragedy of the Walcheren disaster. Most of the transports were hospital or prison ships, which had just returned from the West Indies. They were encrusted in filth and tainted with every kind of disease. To crowd

good troops on board such ships was little less than a crime. An outbreak of sickness was certain. The tempest itself was almost less cruel to the unfortunate soldiers than the British military authorities.

Edward Paget, who afterwards won high fame in the Peninsular War, was in command of the 28th, which formed part of the expedition. Like a good soldier he loved his regiment, and he tells, in almost broken-hearted accents, how he counted the bodies of between 400 and 500 soldiers flung up on the sands of the bay to the west of the Portland roads. Arthur Wellesley observes a Spartan silence as to his experiences in this unhappy expedition, with its disease-infected transports, and climax of general shipwreck. But it must have deepened his intellectual disgust with a soldier's career.

In April, 1796, the 33rd was ordered for service in India. The regiment sailed, but Wellesley was too ill to accompany it. Three months later he sailed in a fast frigate, joined his regiment at the Cape, and reached Calcutta in February, 1797. He returned to England in March, 1805, his term of service in India thus lasting a little over eight years.

Nothing can well be more striking than the contrast betwixt the career of Wellesley in the Netherlands and the part he played in India. In the disastrous campaign in Holland he is one of a broken host, ragged, ill-fed, storm-beaten, without leadership

without a commissariat, creeping sullenly in defeat across a frozen landscape. When his sorely battered regiment regains England Wellesley is ready to give up a soldier's career. A stool in some Treasury office in Dublin, with a modest salary, fills the whole horizon of his ambition.

But in India, almost from the moment he steps upon its soil, he is a man of distinction and influence. He takes part in great affairs. Two months after he had landed in Calcutta he was organising the equipment of an army; in less than two years he was administering the kingdom of Mysore. Within six years of landing, an almost unknown lieutenant-colonel, he was commander-in-chief of the British forces in the Mahratta campaign, and the victor of Assaye. The contrast betwixt the inarticulate aide-de-camp, with empty pockets, at the vice-regal court in Dublin—or the inexperienced soldier, keeping his frozen watch on the Waal—and the brilliant commander in India, negotiating treaties, administering kingdoms, and winning history-making victories, is startling indeed.

In his very able study of Wellington's career, Hooper asks whether any one can believe that "the climate of the Ganges valley" suddenly gave Wellesley a new intellect. Did it endow him with a range of vision, a breadth of judgment, a faculty of leadership which he never before possessed? But India *had* a "climate"—an intellectual and political

atmosphere—which called into action, as with some magic whisper, all the latent powers of a great but, as yet, undeveloped and unknown war-captain.

India was, for him, not only a new land, with strange skies overhead, and men of alien blood and strange speech all about him. It was a field in which he came into contact with new forces. It was the meeting point of the East with the West. A new empire was taking shape. He found himself, at a breath, an actor in a great and swift-moving drama.

Napoleon long afterwards sneered at Wellington as "a Sepoy general." The term on his lips was one of contempt; and yet "a Sepoy general" in India, in the years betwixt 1795 and 1805, found an absolutely unique field for the highest gifts both of the soldier and the statesman. The British came to India as traders, not as adventurers. They were eager for fat profits, but careless—perhaps even suspicious—of empire. But these traders found that in order to buy and sell in security they must constantly be ready to fight; so necessity made them soldiers. They were so few that, in order to survive, they had to play off one native State against another; so they learned to be diplomatists. They had to handle kingdoms, if only as items in their balance-sheets; so, in spite of themselves, they had to be statesmen. And they built an empire, so to speak, incidentally, and while thinking only of dividends.

In this way a handful of traders, men of a white

race, found themselves, probably to their own half disgusted astonishment, laying the foundations of a great dominion amongst the coloured races of the East. The discovery, no doubt, awoke in course of time a strain of imperial pride in them. The sense that they must dare and achieve on a great scale crept, somehow, into the blood of every man of British race in India, from the clerk in a Calcutta office—Clive at first was only such a clerk—and the swearing, hard-fighting private in a British regiment, up to the Governor-General himself.

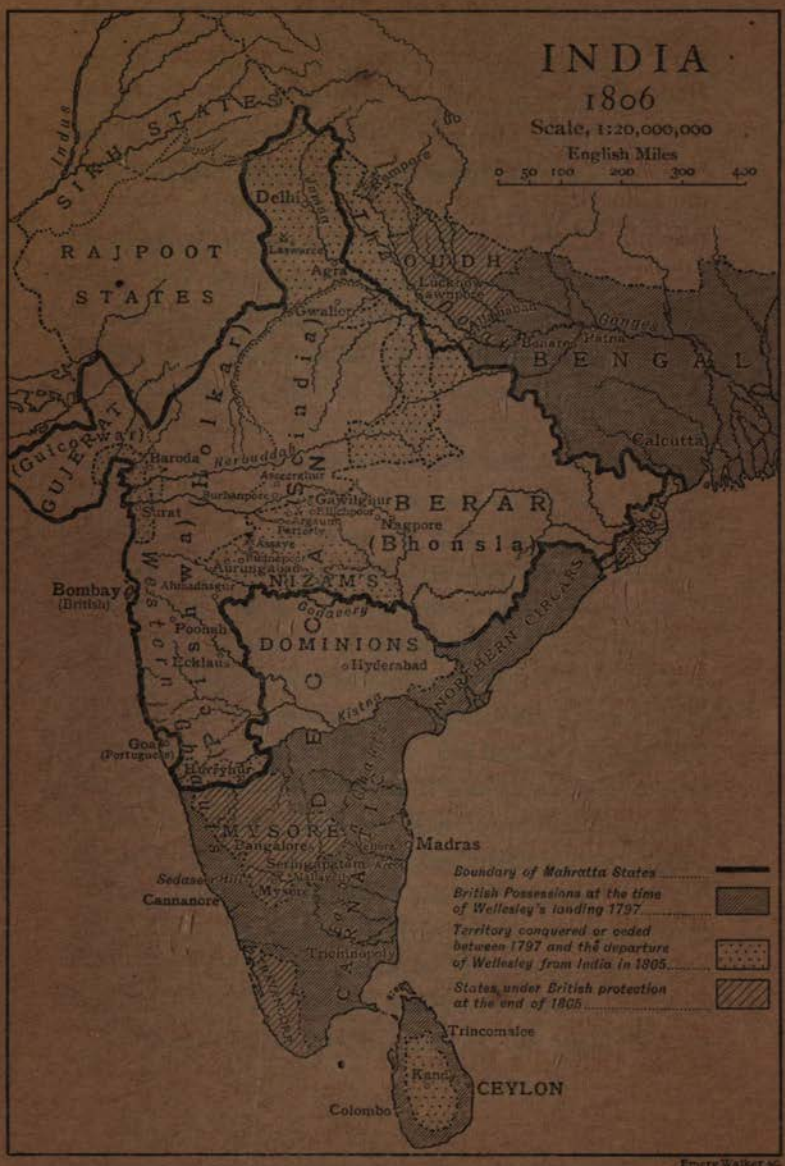
The system of government this company of traders created was delightfully British and absurd, yet curiously effective. The Governor-General at Calcutta had to serve two masters, each representing a separate policy—the Board of Directors at India House, anxious only about their balance-sheets; and the Prime Minister in the House of Commons, concerned for his majority. That such a system survived, that it succeeded where Alexander failed, and built up an empire which to-day is the envy of the world and the wonder of history, is one of the most remarkable events in human annals. But can any one wonder that when Arthur Wellesley, with his as yet unguessed faculty for war and for great affairs, stepped on such a stage, and breathed such an atmosphere, his powers took a range which a hopelessly narrow environment had up to that moment made impossible? Tasks were thrust upon

him in swift succession which were more than opportunities of fame to a young and eager soldier. They were an education, both in war and in statesmanship, for a singularly powerful intellect. Eight years on a field like India, at that particular stage of its history, was for Arthur Wellesley an apprenticeship of simply priceless value.

At the moment Wellesley reached India, even so anxiously pacific a Governor-General as Sir John Shore was contemplating an expedition against Manilla, the capital of the Spanish settlements in the Philippines; an example of that obstinate, and, in a sense, unconscious instinct which made Great Britain, throughout the revolutionary wars, always strike at the colonies of her enemies. Arthur Wellesley had for his first business the organisation of this expedition. It was exactly the task which suited his genius; for perhaps no other soldier in history better understood the business side of war, or excelled him in the care and thoroughness of his preparations for a campaign. He had learned in Holland that bravery in the ranks could not make up for failure in the commissariat; and he applied that lesson to his work in India with characteristic thoroughness.

The expedition sailed, it reached Penang, but was recalled by the discovery of Tippoo's correspondence with the French in the Isle of France, a peril so near home that it forbade any foreign adventure.

The state of affairs in India at the moment was



Emery Walker sc.

very critical. British power was supreme in the Ganges valley; but the Madras territory was a mere coastal strip, and Bombay little more than a seaport. The great Mohammedan empire, which once dominated India, had fallen into a condition resembling nothing so much as that of an exploded planet, and its mighty fragments—Mysore, the Deccan, and the Mahratta principalities — had become independent powers. All were plotting against each other, and all, it may be added, were more or less hostile to the British.

The Mahratta confederacy was the most powerful combination of native states. It dominated Hindustan proper—all the country north of the Nerbuddah; and if it had been welded into unity, either by a common policy or by the energy of some single leader, it might have sent its fast-riding horsemen eastward to Calcutta, westward to Bombay, and south to the sea, and built a new empire. But the Mahratta confederacy was broken into fragments by tribal feuds, by race hatreds, and by the ambitions of quarrelling leaders. There remained the two great Mohammedan states to the south, Mysore and the Deccan. The Nizam, who ruled in the Deccan, was, for the British, an uncertain and worthless ally. Mysore, where Tippoo, the son of Hyder Ali, reigned, was a deadlier, if only because nearer, enemy to the British settlements than the Mahrattas.

Tippoo Sahib was the ambitious son of a daring father, in whose blood burned a flame of hate against the British, hate bred of humiliation and defeat. He had a certain touch of genius; but there gleamed in his genius at least a spark of insanity. He had built up patiently, and with lavish expenditure, an army 70,000 strong, drilled into efficiency by French officers, and he was sending his emissaries far, and in every direction, in search of allies against the hated British. He tried to bring the Mahrattas into league with himself, but his chief hope lay in the French.

French adventurers, who sold their swords, and their military knowledge, to the native princes, are a picturesque feature in the Indian landscape of that period. They were great in numbers, not seldom had a real genius for war, and they constituted a disturbing element of dangerous scale. De Boigne had trained 20,000 good infantry for Scindia at Agra and Delhi. At Hyderabad Raymond, a soldier of a fine type, had organised and equipped a corps 14,000 strong for the Nizam. Moreover, the French Revolution had sent its far-running echoes round the world, and even the slumbering East stirred at the sound. The Mauritius, a French colony, was within a few days' sail of the Indian coast. When Napoleon sailed for Egypt, India found a place within the wide horizon of his plans. His sure, keen glance fastened itself on Tippoo as the most

dangerous enemy to England. "I have arrived," he wrote to him, "on the borders of the Red Sea at the head of a countless and invincible army filled with the desire to deliver you from the yoke of England. I am anxious that you should send to Suez or to Cairo an intelligent person in whom you have perfect confidence, that he may communicate with me. May the Almighty augment your power and destroy your enemies."

What might not happen if French revolutionary fire linked itself to Eastern fanaticism, or if some French soldier of genius, with an army behind him, landed on Indian soil! That some detachment of the armies of the Revolution might reach India was a dangerous possibility. If French *élan*, in a word—the habit of swift and fierce onfall—were acquired by the vast masses of the native armies, then, indeed, British rule in India would become difficult, perhaps even impossible.

When Wellesley began his Indian career, in brief, two questions of the first scale were disturbing Indian politics. One issue was whether the French or the English were to be supreme in India; the other, whether the native states might not crystallise into an overwhelming combination against the British. And the two questions, at bottom, were one.

CHAPTER II

TWO GREAT BROTHERS

"Great jealousy will arise among the general officers in consequence of my employing you; but I do so because I rely upon your good sense, decision, activity, and spirit, and I cannot find all these qualities united in any other officer in India who could take such a command."—LORD MORNINGTON *to his* BROTHER.

TOWARDS the end of 1797 Wellesley's elder brother, Lord Mornington, was offered the Governor-Generalship of India. Mornington was one of the ablest men in a generation singularly rich in statesmanship. He stood in the inner circle of British politics, was the trusted friend of Pitt, and was himself the keenest of politicians. He hesitated to accept the post in India; it seemed to him little better than a splendid banishment. Yet he had been for some years a member of the Board of Control, was familiar with Indian affairs, and probably no other man in Great Britain was so fitted for the great position that had to be filled, or had such a vision of its possibilities. Arthur Wellesley strongly urged his brother to accept the offer; it represented, he argued, "the fairest opportunity of rendering material assistance to the public, and of

doing yourself credit." Mornington finally accepted the post, and by that act wrote his name imperishably on history.

Like his younger brother, Mornington had lofty ideals of public duty. "I would not," he declared, "accept this high station unless I were assured of my possessing firmness enough to govern the British Empire in India without favour or affection to any human being either in Europe or Asia." Arthur Wellesley himself told his brother he "expected to derive no advantage from the new appointment which I could not obtain if any other person were Governor-General." Both men were absolutely sincere; yet the fact that his brother held that great post secured to Arthur Wellesley opportunities which otherwise would hardly have fallen —or fallen so soon—into his hands.

It needs a certain perspective, born of distance, to enable us to see the just scale of any character; and brothers, if only because of their nearness to each other, are not often able to form a true estimate of each other's qualities. Mornington, however, had that gift for judging men which is one quality of a great ruler, and he realised, as probably nobody else at that moment did, the great natural gifts of his soldier brother.

The two brothers, it may be added, were in many respects curiously unlike. Each, indeed, was, in a sense, the opposite, and so the complement, of

the other. The elder was fiery, the younger cool; the one shone in speech, the other in action. Mornington, perhaps, was swifter in decision than his brother, but Arthur Wellesley had an unsurpassed faculty for measuring the force required in any adventure, forecasting all its difficulties, and preparing adequately for all chances. Lord Ellesmere[1] insists that the two brothers represented quite unlike intellectual types. "If Virgil and Cæsar," he says, "Pope and Cromwell, had been brothers, the contrast could hardly have been more striking." The parallel, in a sense, is absurd. Lord Mornington and Virgil, or Pope, are contrasted—not agreed—types; and Arthur Wellesley cannot by any literary ingenuity be fitted to the outlines of Cæsar or of Cromwell. Moreover, the two famous brothers are not to be judged by any merely literary tests. In statesmanship, in energy of will, in the power to read all the elements of a difficult situation, and the courage to deal with them, they had kindred genius.

The elder brother was in speech and look the more brilliant of the two; but the younger had a range and strength and depth of faculty which enabled him to make a much more enduring mark on history. And Great Britain was never better served in India than when she had one Wellesley at Government House in Calcutta, and another commanding an army in Mysore.

[1] "Personal Reminiscences," p. 86.

Almost at the moment when Lord Mornington assumed office it was discovered that Tippoo Sahib was in communication with General Malartic, the Governor of the Mauritius, then a French colony. He issued a proclamation promising French assistance to Tippoo in his approaching war with the British, and this fell into the hands of Lord Mornington. It showed that Tippoo was ready to swoop down from his tablelands upon Madras, and was sending his emissaries far in search of allies. The peril revealed was great, and Mornington, with his high courage and impatient temper, was not likely to loiter in such a crisis. He instantly resolved on war, and directed General Harris, then Acting-Governor at Madras, to prepare for a march on Seringapatam. But Sir John Shore, Mornington's predecessor, who believed—in spite of all history—that the British in India could be at once inert and secure, had ceased either to anticipate war or to maintain readiness for it. As a result, the British military establishments had fallen into deplorable neglect.

Arthur Wellesley was a keen soldier, but he had a cooler head and a surer judgment than his civilian brother. He knew that war, at best, was an evil; and he had seen in Holland what war means when undertaken without preparation or competent leadership. He bluntly told his brother that the British forces were not ready for a campaign, and

urged that Tippoo should be given the largest and most tempting opportunities for disavowing his alliance with the French. "There is every probability," he wrote, "that he will deny the whole, and be glad of an opportunity of getting out of the scrape. In the meantime," he added, "we shall believe as much as we please, and shall be prepared against all events." Arthur Wellesley, in a word, felt sure that Tippoo, whose plans were incomplete, would gladly use any device to secure a longer interval for preparation; and this would give the British, in their turn, time to prepare, and they would make better use of the chance than their foe.

Wellesley always had the eye of a good soldier for the physical landscape. Even when riding to hounds in his old age, he took in with a sure glance, and kept in unforgetting memory, hill and stream, road and hedge; and this is, for a soldier, one of the most useful of gifts. But he had an eye as sure, a vision as wide, a memory as tenacious, for what may be called the political landscape, and India called this great gift into exercise, and gave it an unrivalled field. He could see in just perspective the native states of India, and assess exactly the degree of peril to the British power each represented; the near and immediate danger in the Mysore; and, more remote, but in vaster and more menacing outlines, the challenge of Mahratta power.

Thus he was exactly the counsellor his more impetuous brother needed.

Mornington yielded to his advice, and the delay thus secured was turned to instant use. Madras was visibly the point threatened, and Wellesley was sent there. He had no official appointment, but by simple force of energy, and because he visibly was the one man who knew what ought to be done, and how to do it, he became the driving force in all the preparations for war. He put the frontier fortresses into an effective condition, organised a great commissariat, pushed on the equipment of every branch of the army, and did this with a stern thoroughness unknown, till then, in Indian history.

Wellesley understood, almost by instinct, the true law of Indian warfare: "To engage in hostilities," he wrote, "with anything short of the most complete success — namely, being able to invest Seringapatam with good prospect of taking it—is ruin." Cornwallis had failed, in his invasion of Mysore, in 1791. He started late, was delayed by having to capture its border fortresses, and embarrassed by having to protect his convoys. But, said Wellesley, "as we have now that iron frontier, the fortresses, which we never had in our possession in the last war, we shall escape these difficulties."

Meanwhile, one near and immediate danger had to be met. The Nizam was an uncertain ally, from the mere faithlessness of his character; and

the forces organised for him by the French might become, at any moment, a source of deadly peril. The flank of the British columns advancing on Seringapatam would lie open to their stroke. Raymond, a soldier of genius, had organised and equipped a disciplined force of 14,000 men. It was more even than a *corps d'armée*; it was a settlement, the germ of an empire. Territory had been assigned for its support, foundries were established under skilled Europeans for the manufacture of artillery and muskets. The force carried French colours, it had the cap of liberty engraved on the buttons of every private. Malcolm was then resident in Hyderabad, and he watched the growth of this force with anxious eyes. In his despatches he denounced it, with amusing wrath, as "a nest of democrats." To permit it to exist would be to imperil the future of Great Britain in India; but to suppress it would need, he admitted, "uncommon nerve" on the part of the new Governor-General. He was prepared to judge Lord Mornington's insight by the estimate he formed of this danger, and his courage by the manner in which he dealt with it.

Lord Mornington was equal to the situation. Raymond died just then, and a German officer, Perron, succeeded to the command. He was a good soldier, but lacked Raymond's brilliancy. The Nizam had entered into an engagement to disband his French regiments, but the task was too great

for his courage; the British themselves, he said, must undertake it. Accordingly, two brigades under the command of Colonel Roberts moved quietly but swiftly to Hyderabad. On reaching the city, no time was lost. One brigade was placed at the rear of the French camp, betwixt it and the river, the other was drawn up in its front; 1500 cavalry under Malcolm were placed on the right, a smaller party of horse under Captain Greene on its left. Colonel Roberts was instructed to summon the French to unconditional surrender, and if no answer came, at the end of half-an-hour, to attack. Before Roberts had sent in his demand, however, tumult broke out in the French camp. The men were seizing their officers. No resistance was attempted, and, without firing a shot, 14,000 French Sepoys piled their arms before the British lines, and marched off. The whole cantonment, with its arsenals and guns, its foundries and stores, fell into British hands, and the famed French corps of Hyderabad vanished like a shadow. The storehouses in the cantonment were filled with arms and clothing sufficient to equip a second army of 12,000 men.

The stroke, alike in its inspiration, and in the swiftness and resolution with which it was accomplished, resembles nothing so much as the seizure of the Danish fleet at Copenhagen nine years afterwards. It may, indeed, have suggested that

stroke. It may be added that the battalions which the French had trained with such care formed the column under Wellesley's command in the march on Seringapatam a few months later.

The Nizam made terms with the Governor-General, consented to put his force into the hands of British officers, and, as discipline could not be maintained without the regular payment of the soldiers' wages, it was agreed that the revenues of certain territories should be assigned for the support of these troops. This was, in fact, the principle of subsidiary alliances which, by the treaty of Bassein, was later extended over the whole of northern India.

The field was now clear for the inevitable fight with Tippoo; and Wellesley's task at Madras, preparing for the advance on Seringapatam, was great and difficult. The magazines were almost empty; the Sepoys, both in discipline and equipment, were unfit for active war; there was no commissariat, no transport, no hospital supplies. General Craig, writing to Lord Mornington, said, "It is beyond dispute that for the lack of two things—discipline and military knowledge—our Indian empire has during the last four years hung upon the slightest possible thread." Wellesley's energy and exactitude, his practical knowledge, his passion for thoroughness in the minutest details, his knowledge of what war meant, and

on what the efficiency of an army depends, found here an ample field for exercise. He had no official position; he was embarrassed by what he called "that cursed institution," the military board; but General Harris had sufficient wit to recognise good work when he saw it, and sense enough to support a good workman. Sometimes, indeed, even Wellesley grew tired of his wrestle with human stupidity and sloth. He writes to his brother Henry, "I am heartily sick of the business, and wish I were anywhere else." But he allowed neither himself nor any one else to flag. He humoured the caprices of the native grain merchants, pricked the slowness of Madras officials into energy, frightened the dishonest, stirred the blood of the inert, taught method to the stupid; so that when, at the end of January, 1799, General Harris rode into the camp, he found what he declared to be "the best-organised and disciplined army ever brought together in India."

Wellesley had urged his brother to come to Madras in order to quicken the pace at which preparations were being urged. The presence of so masterful a Governor-General, added to the stern vigilance and tireless energy of Wellesley himself, produced extraordinary results. But the Governor-General proposed to visit the camp at Vellore, where the force about to begin its march

on Seringapatam was assembled, and to accompany the columns; and here the instinct of the soldier in his younger brother broke out with a touch of vehemence. An army can have but one head—its commander-in-chief; and the presence of the Governor-General would, as a matter of fact, efface the commander. "If I were in General Harris's situation," Arthur Wellesley wrote to his brother, "and you joined the army, I should quit it." The Governor-General accepted that blunt warning, and allowed the army to begin its march without the perplexity of his "assistance."

CHAPTER III

THE DUEL WITH TIPPOO SAHIB

"If the French teach their new mode of fighting to the soldiers of the native states it will be impossible for us, with our scanty numbers, to oppose them."—WELLESLEY.

THE force moving on Seringapatam numbered 35,000, with no less than 120,000 followers. A corps of 6000, from Bombay, under General Stuart, landed at Cannanore, and moved up the Western Ghauts to Sedaseer, a high hill-shoulder whence Seringapatam was almost visible. The contingent of the Nizam's troops numbered about 16,000 men. Harris attached to it the 33rd, and this gave Wellesley, as its colonel, the command of the whole wing, much to the disgust of Baird, who was Wellesley's senior in age and rank, and was a good soldier. Why should a brigadier command only three regiments and a colonel thirteen? The arrangement was, no doubt, cruel to Baird, but it gave a great opportunity to Wellesley and was justified by the logic of results.

The force under Harris moved slowly, a vast

creeping parallelogram—a column of infantry on either flank—with guns, bullocks, elephants, carts, coolies almost past count betwixt them. When on the march there was a multitude in motion which covered about sixteen square miles; and for this vast host to struggle through the passes in the Ghauts was a difficult task. The stragglers grew into multitudes; the baggage animals perished in hordes, the army had to halt almost every second day to gather itself into shape again.

"The failure of the bullocks," Wellesley wrote, "increased in so alarming a manner that in the last march towards Bangalore, I had serious apprehensions that we should be obliged to take post there and defer our operations till the ensuing season. The root of the evil lay in a parcel of shop-keeping regulations under which no great undertaking could ever prosper. The first step taken was to abolish them all."[1]

Tippoo Sahib was being threatened by two converging columns, the main body under Harris, and Stuart's force from Bombay; and Tippoo had generalship enough to see that, occupying a central position, he could fling himself on either of the two columns before they effected a junction.

He made his choice, and leaped upon Stuart on March 5, when Harris, with the main body

[1] "Supplementary Despatches," ii. p. 207.

and his enormous train, was yet struggling through the narrow valleys; but his stroke failed in resolution. In place of flinging his utmost strength on Stuart's scanty force, he marched against it with only 11,000 men. He caught three Sepoy battalions separated by a belt of jungle from the rest of the British force; but Colonel Montressor, who was in command, kept his battalions steady, and for five hours resisted all attacks, till, just as ammunition was failing, the 77th and 75th came up and swept Tippoo's columns into ruin, with a loss of 1500 men.

Harris, meanwhile, had reached the open country, and on March 17 found Tippoo in his front, drawn up on a range of heights at Mellavelly. Tippoo was strong in cavalry—"the finest horsemen I have ever seen," says Wellesley—and if he had launched these agile swarms on Harris's columns, cutting off his stragglers, and giving no quiet to his plodding infantry, he might have wrought enormous mischief. Instead of this, he drew up his force on a range of heights, entrenched himself, and waited an attack.

Harris struck at him without delay. Wellesley with the 33rd leading, advanced in echelon, turning Tippoo's right flank, and the steady volleys and the relentless advance of the 33rd were irresistible. But Tippoo did not lack generalship. Wellesley's movement seemed to open a gap in the British

centre, and Tippoo made a counter-stroke at this point. His men rode to their attack with high daring. Some of them, indeed, broke through the intervals of the British line and reached Harris, and there was an angry splutter of pistol shots betwixt his staff and these daring horsemen. Wellesley himself says that "Tippoo's troops behaved better than they have ever been known to behave. His infantry almost stood the charge of the bayonets of the 33rd. . . . His light cavalry are the best in the world. . . . If Tippoo had had sense and spirit sufficient to use his cavalry and infantry as he might have done, I have no hesitation in saying that we should not now be here, and probably should not be out of the jungles in Bangalore."[1]

But Floyd, with three regiments of horse, rode at the enemy's column, broke it into fragments, and, in spite of a rally on the part of Tippoo's cavalry, the whole force was flung into confused retreat. Wellesley had fought his first battle on Indian soil, and had taken the measure of the fighting quality of an Indian army under native leadership.

The road was now open to Seringapatam, only twenty-eight miles distant, yet it took Harris's weary and baggage-encumbered army five days to cover that distance. Seringapatam stood on an island at

[1] "Supplementary Despatches," ii. p. 280.

the junction of the rivers Cauvry and Coleroon, and had an aspect of Eastern mass and picturesqueness. It was of great strength, as Indian fortresses go, girded with double walls and an immense chain of massive works; but its defences lacked the scientific perfection of a modern fortress. The palace of the Sultan, and one of the most beautiful mosques in India, showed, a forest of lance-like minarets, against the sky above the line of the fortifications.

The forces of Tippoo Sahib amounted to over 70,000, but many of his levies were quite unsuited for the defence of the city, and its actual garrison consisted of 22,000 picked troops. On the walls were mounted some 280 guns. Cornwallis, who had besieged the city in 1791, had attacked the northern front, and had failed, principally owing to the rise of the river. Harris chose the southern front for his attack. To establish his batteries, however, he had to push back a line of the enemy's outposts, holding an aqueduct, a chain of ruined villages, and a cluster of trees, from which they harassed the British camp. General Baird, with a strong force, had searched this line two nights before, and found it empty, but the enemy re-occupied it after he had withdrawn.

On the night of April 5, Harris directed Wellesley, with the 33rd and a battalion of Sepoys, to attack the wooded end of this line, while Lieutenant-Colonel

Shaw, with a battalion of the 12th and a Sepoy battalion, moved out to seize a ruined village and the aqueduct at the other end of the line. The whole position, as it turned out, was strongly held by the enemy. Shaw carried the village and aqueduct, but Wellesley's battalions lost their way, and got out of hand. The night was black; the ranks were broken by the trees through which the battalion had to force its way, and by tiny canals which ran everywhere. In the confusion and darkness Wellesley lost sight of his men; twelve of the Grenadier Company fell into the enemy's hands. "At midnight," says General Harris, in his private diary, "Colonel Wellesley came into my camp in a good deal of agitation to say he had not carried the tope." Wellesley's second in command, Major Shea, brought the detachment back into camp. He had offered his assistance to Shaw, and was told by him that "the 12th did not require his help; he had better follow his leader."

Wellesley, it seems, had lost his way, had stumbled in the darkness amid the trees and the canals for some hours, and when he reached his general's tent, was almost exhausted. General Harris went into another compartment of the tent for a few moments, and when he returned Wellesley sat with his head fallen forward on the table, sound asleep!

The next morning Harris directed that the outposts should be assailed again, the attacking force

being greatly strengthened, and Wellesley was in orders to lead the assault. The fixed time came, the men were in readiness, but Wellesley put in no appearance. Harris was impatient, and called on Baird to lead the attack, and the big Scotchman was in the act of riding off towards the waiting battalions, when Harris called him back, saying that, upon reflection, he thought they must "wait a little longer for Wellesley." Presently Wellesley came hurrying up; the morning orders, it seemed, had not reached him. He at once took charge of the attack, and the outposts were carried with ease.

It is clear that the attack on the previous night was made without sufficient knowledge of the ground. Wellesley himself had written to the general, saying that he did not understand where the post was to be established, and begged him to ride out in front of the lines and point out the exact place. His own explanation of the incident is that "the night was very dark, the enemy expected us, and was strongly posted in an almost impenetrable jungle. . . . At last, as we could not find out the post it was desirable I should occupy, I was obliged to desist from the attack." He adds, "I have come to a determination never to suffer an attack to be made by night upon an enemy who is prepared, and strongly posted, and whose posts have not been reconnoitred by daylight." The whole incident has been described as "Wellington's

first failure"; and that an attack at night—on a post which had not been reconnoitred, and which was a tangle of trees, intersected with canals—failed is not strange.

What was it shook a man of Wellesley's iron nerves out of his composure? Certainly not the failure of the attack, but the fact that he had lost touch with his men, and came back without them. He presented himself to his general as a commander who had become separated from his men when in the presence of the enemy. It was left to his second in command, Major Shea, to bring the men back. That is an incident which might well have ruined the career of any officer. The twelve unfortunate grenadiers, it may be added, met with a cruel fate. Tippoo ordered them to be killed by having nails driven into their skulls.

When the actual siege began the north-western angle of the fortifications was chosen as the point to be attacked, and the Bombay troops were sent over the river to establish batteries there. The projecting angle of the defences was thus smitten by a converging fire, under which ramparts and curtains crumbled into ruin. On the night of May 2nd the river was forded, and the breach explored by some daring officers. The 4th was fixed for the assault, and Baird was named for leader. Baird had known strange experiences in the city. He had been captured by Hyder Ali when the unfortunate force

under Colonel Bailey was destroyed in 1784, and had lain for nearly four years a prisoner in Seringapatam. He had watched his fellow-captives go mad, die of fever, or taken out to be poisoned or tortured to death. He himself had endured humiliations and hardships which might well have killed a man of less heroic spirit and gigantic physique. And now he was to be repaid for those four years of suffering by leading the British attack on the city in which he had endured so much.

The attacking force consisted of the flank companies of all the British regiments, with some Sepoy battalions, the whole forming a force of about 4500 men. Baird packed his companies in the trenches before daybreak, and kept them concealed there till noon, when he knew Tippoo's troops would be taking their siesta. At one o'clock, while the white heat of the Indian sun was beating on the drowsy city, the general and his staff, watching from the British lines, saw the tall figure of Baird himself leap from the trenches. "Follow me," he cried to the soldiers about him, "and show yourselves worthy of the name of Englishmen." The western face of the enemy's defences broke into a sudden fury of musketry fire; but those who watched saw the British, in loose order, splash through the shallow river, and sweep up the breach, till its ragged slope seemed to be, as one observer writes, "covered with a cloud of crimson."

Baird had divided his attacking party into two columns. One under Sherbrook was to sweep the ramparts to the right, the other, led by Dunlop, was to swing to the left as soon as the breach was gained. Dunlop fell on the breach itself, but the rush of the stormers was not checked. The two columns, vieing with each other in the speed and fury of their rush, gained the summit and swung to the right and the left. An unexpected obstacle, a deep foss, was suddenly discovered, stretching across the angle of the fortifications, and for a moment it seemed an impassable barrier. Baird, however, had a soldier's quick eye. He saw a stretch of scaffolding which had been erected against a wall for the purpose of repairing a breach. The planks and poles were seized and flung athwart the foss, the storming party scrambled over the slender, swaying bridge, and the sound of the firing swept inwards towards the heart of the city.

The "Asiatic Register" for that year says that "when Dunlop fell, the forlorn hope was led by a sergeant of one of the light companies named Graham." He had mounted the breach, then, pulling off his hat, he cried out exultantly, "Success to Lieutenant Graham!" He believed he had won a commission by being first up the breach. He planted a flag on the broken stones, exclaiming, "Hang 'em, I will show them the British flag," and the next moment fell dead, shot through the head.

Tippoo himself, when the news of the British assault reached him, hurried to the point of danger, and, taking his position behind a traverse which commanded the approaches from the bridge, commenced firing on the attacking force. The rush of the stormers swept him back till he was driven into the covered gateway leading into the town. Here a shot wounded him; he was caught in the crush of the flying troops. The British stormers, running up, opened a deadly fire on the crowd, then they came on with the bayonet. Tippoo's attendants had placed their wounded master in a palanquin, to carry him away; but this, in the panic and confusion, was cast down and abandoned. A British soldier running forward saw Tippoo lying, and, attracted by the glittering belt he wore, tried to seize it. The wounded Sultan struck at the man with his sword and slightly wounded him, whereupon the angry soldier levelled his musket and shot him dead. His body was stripped almost naked, and lay there in the heap of the slain, buried beneath many other dead bodies.

Meanwhile the city had fallen. Wellesley having been left in command of the reserve had by this brought up his men into the captured city. A search was made for the body of the fallen Sultan. The archway where he met his fate was low and dark; torches had to be obtained, and at last, buried beneath many slain, was found the

body of the most formidable enemy to the British power in India. Wellesley himself stood by when the body was discovered, and he has recorded that so life-like was the expression of the dead monarch that, not until he had put his hand on the wrist and over the heart of the fallen Sultan, was he satisfied that Tippoo was dead. About him, or over him, lay seventy dead bodies in a space little more than twelve feet long and four feet wide. The prison where Baird, with his fellow-officers, lay in irons for nearly four years was close to the spot where the Sultan fell.

CHAPTER IV

A GREAT ROBBER-HUNT

"The destruction of this man is necessary to our tranquillity. When the chase is once begun honour requires that we go through with the business."—WELLESLEY.

THE siege had lasted scarcely a month; the British lost in the assault—killed, wounded, and missing—only a little over 400 men and officers, facts which show with what skill the operations had been conducted. The booty was enormous. The arsenal contained nearly a thousand guns; the treasury was rich in gold and jewels.

Baird, meanwhile, returned to the camp to report in person to the commander-in-chief, and Wellesley, as the next senior officer, took over the command of the captured city. He allowed it to be plundered for hours; for on this point—as the story of more than one siege in the Peninsula showed—he held the doctrine that a certain amount of license was to be allowed to soldiers who had carried the breach of a hostile city. "It is impossible," he wrote to his brother, "to expect that after the labour which the troops had undergone

in working up to the place, and the various successes which they had had in those difficult affairs with Tippoo's troops, in all of which they had come to the bayonet with them, they should not have looked to the plunder of the place." On the night of the 4th, accordingly, unchecked license reigned in Seringapatam. Scarcely a house in the town was left unplundered. On the morning of the 5th, however, Wellesley drew the reins of discipline tight with a stern hand. He sent notes at brief intervals to Harris, during that day, reporting the state of things in the town. Here are some of these brief memoranda, written amid the tumult of a sacked city:

"10 A.M. *5th May.*

"We are in such confusion still, that I recommend it to you not to come in till to-morrow, or, at soonest, late this evening."

"*Half-past twelve.*

"I wish you would send the provost here, and put him under my orders. Until some of the plunderers are hanged, it is vain to expect to stop the plunder."

"3 P.M.

"Things are better than they were, but they are still very bad; and until the provost executes three or four people, it is impossible to expect order, or, indeed, safety."

"*6th May.*

"Plunder is stopped; the fires are all extinguished, and the inhabitants are returning to their houses fast. I am now employed in burying the dead, which I hope will be completed this day, particularly if you send me all the pioneers.

"(*Signed*) ARTHUR WELLESLEY."

Seringapatam had seven principal streets; and, according to one story, Wellesley hanged a plunderer in each one of these by way of warning. He was confirmed in his charge of the city, an appointment which moved Baird, who was hot-blooded by temper, to new fury. He had protested in vain when Wellesley had been put in command of Harris's right column; and now it seemed as if the soldier who had actually stormed the city was to be robbed of his justly earned reward by the colonel who had only commanded the reserve. "Before the sweat was dry on my brow," Baird wrote, "I was superseded by an inferior officer."

Wellesley himself, however, with that cool self-assertion which he was capable of displaying, said afterwards, "There were many other candidates beside Baird and myself, all senior to me, and some to Baird; but I must say that I was the fit person to be selected." "Baird," as he told Croker years afterwards, "was a gallant, hard-headed, lion-hearted officer; but he had no talent, no tact. He had strong prejudices against the natives, and was peculiarly disqualified from his manners and his temper for the management of them." He cherished a natural—and almost passionate—resentment for the ill-treatment he had received in Seringapatam from Tippoo, and Wellesley suggested that the knowledge of this feeling induced Harris to lay him aside. Lord Mornington, writing

to Harris two months later, said, "If you had not established him (Colonel Wellesley) at Seringapatam, I should have done it by my own authority, because I believe he is universally admitted to possess the necessary qualifications for such employment."

Wellesley's record for the next three months as governor of Seringapatam is nothing less than splendid. The task exactly suited his genius. He had to restore discipline amongst the troops, order and confidence in the town; to superintend the collection and distribution of the plunder; set trade going in the bazaars, and advise as to the disposition of the conquered territory. So quickly did he re-establish the reign of law in the captured city, and win the confidence of its inhabitants, that by the third day after the assault the shops and bazaars were opened, and trade was as busy as before the siege began, and much more secure. For the ordered justice of British rule had taken the place of an eastern despot's caprice.

On July 9, 1799, Wellesley was appointed to the command of the forces in Mysore, and, practically, the administration of the whole kingdom fell into his hands, the new Rajah being a child five years old. His task was difficult. The war practically dislocated the very structure of society. It had arrested trade and set the roads swarming with robbers; Tippoo's defeated and scattered forces had formed themselves into plundering bands under a

hundred light-riding captains. Not a few of the border fortresses, too, yet remained uncaptured. Wellesley's task was to restore social order on what may be called Roman methods—building roads, scattering robber bands, enforcing justice. He was swift, stern, active, always in the saddle, making his masterful will and energetic common-sense felt everywhere. He gathered about him a band of officers almost as tireless as himself, so that everywhere justice grew swift-footed, and order began to spread through Mysore. Wellesley, with his curt speech, his direct methods, his quick, clean-handed justice, that could neither be bribed, nor resisted, nor delayed, his scorn of pomp, his simple diet, seemed to be the very antithesis of an Eastern ruler; and yet he quickly grew popular. Here was a new phenomenon, a ruler who took no bribes, who knew no caprice, who worked harder than any peasant, whose words, if they were few, were to be absolutely trusted.

Amongst the swarm of robber-captains evolved from the debris of the campaign, however, was one —Dhoondiah Waugh—who attained a swift and evil pre-eminence, and adorned himself with the magnificent title of "King of the World." He was a nameless man, and began his career as a Mahratta trooper under Hyder Ali, at whose death he set up as a freebooter, on his own account, in the Mysore. Tippoo Sahib found him troublesome, beguiled him

into his power, compelled him to turn Mohammedan, and then held him in captivity—the fierce Mahratta spirit fretting, as may be imagined, in the gloom of Tippoo's dungeon. In the general gaol delivery which followed the capture of Seringapatam by the British he was set free, and naturally betook himself to his vocation as a robber again. He was daring, adroit, hardy; knew every hill pass and jungle track in the country with the intimate knowledge of a wild animal, and had the furtive habits and the cruelty of a wild animal. He quickly gathered about himself, principally from Tippoo's broken cavalry, a small army of disbanded soldiers, and made himself master of several fortresses.

In Indian history the freebooter of to-day might easily become the founder of a dynasty to-morrow. Why should not Dhoondiah Waugh conquer half India, and become another Hyder Ali, or another Holkar? The light-riding, flitting band of plunderers under him threatened to become an army. Wellesley, with his keen eye and sure judgment, early saw the possibility of mischief in this freebooter. He writes on May 29: "He is certainly a despicable enemy, but one against whom we have been obliged to make a formidable preparation. It is absolutely necessary to the peace of this country that this man should be given up to us."

The "King of the World" was naturally careless of all boundaries. He had secured right of asylum

across the Mahratta border, for there is an easy affinity betwixt a robber-captain and a nation of robbers; and Wellesley, after declaring again "the destruction of this man is absolutely necessary to our tranquillity," adds that "when the chase after Dhoondiah is begun, our honour would require that we should go through with the business." But if this involved chasing him across the Mahratta border, plainly it might raise serious issues.

Wellesley at last undertook to hunt down the "King of the World." He began the task on June 15, and ran his prey to earth on September 10; and the story of that three months' chase, tireless, deadly, exhausting, makes a stirring tale. It was a three months' duel betwixt trained and civilised intelligence and the hereditary craft of a jungle-robber; and the civilised brain won.

Dhoondiah was reported to have gathered about himself a force of 5000 broken soldiers, wild spirits impatient of discipline, but tireless riders, and familiar with every wrinkle on the face of the country. Wellesley organised a force consisting of two brigades of cavalry and three of infantry. His commission from the Governor-General ran: "You are to pursue Dhoondiah Waugh wherever you may find him and hang him on the first tree." But the field was wide; the south-west monsoon had broken when the chase began, and the western Ghauts were streaming with rivulets tumbling into all the tribu-

taries of the Kistna, so that in every direction there were flooded streams. When the rains were past the hot season followed, and the business of chasing such a prey as Dhoondiah, across a field so vast and under such weather conditions, was very trying.

Wellesley had organised three light columns—one under his own command; he drew his lines again and again round the robber-chief he was hunting, and kept up the pursuit with tireless vigilance. His correspondence at the time shows with what shrewdness he read the mind of this Mahratta freebooter, guessed his plans, and wore him down with the sleepless energy of his pursuit. Dhoondiah had secured several hill-fortresses, but these were for him little better than snares, as they fixed him down to definite points; and towards the end of July Wellesley leaped on these fortresses one after the other. On the last day of July, by a forced march of twenty-six miles, he captured the whole of Dhoondiah's baggage and guns. Dhoondiah himself, however, escaped, and the chase had to be renewed. One of Dhoondiah's discontented followers deserted him, and offered to bring the chase to an end by assassinating his old chief. But Wellesley curtly rejected the proposal. "To offer a reward in public proclamation for a man's head, and to make a private bargain to kill him," he said, "are two different things. Often a commander of troops will do the one, but is bound to abstain from the other."

Wellesley learned by his failures. He writes to Stevenson on August 30: "Our last operations against Dhoondiah had this fault: we pushed him from the westward before we were prepared from the eastward to stop him; and we must take care to avoid the same error in future. It is impossible to expect to catch him, or to distress him, so as to reduce his force by any direct movement upon his rear, because, in truth, he can march as far in one day without distress as we can in two days by making the greatest efforts." But Wellesley had taught his sunburnt columns to march with a speed hitherto unknown in Indian warfare. Again and again they covered from twenty-five to thirty miles a day; and this, under an August, or a September, sun in India, and over sandy plains, or through jungle-clad hills, was a remarkable feat.

On September 10 Wellesley ran his prey to earth. On the previous night he had pushed ahead of his infantry and found that the "King of the World" was in camp less than ten miles distant. The night was black, the rain was falling, his squadrons were exhausted, and Wellesley allowed them to rest until an hour before the dawn; then he moved out. Dhoondiah on his part was stirring early, but not so early as his British pursuer. He was just moving from his camp when he saw, breaking out of the jungle in front and on either flank of him, the lines of British horsemen. The freebooter had

about 5000 horse with him, and held a strong position; Wellesley had only four weak cavalry regiments, numbering little more than a thousand men. He formed his horsemen in a single line, so as to cover the whole front of the enemy, and then rode straight on his prey.

The Mahratta was quick in decision; he could not fly, he must fight; he had a force of 5000 men, hard-bitten troopers, and he swiftly distributed them for the coming fight. His men knew they were cornered like rats, and for a time they showed the fierceness of cornered rats; but nothing could resist the British charge. The line of galloping horse swept over the ridge held by the enemy, broke and scattered them, and followed in keen pursuit.

Amongst the dead bodies in the camp itself lay that of the "King of the World." He had fought his last fight. In one of the baggage waggons was found his son, a boy four years old. He was brought to Wellesley's tent, and it is pleasant to know that the stern soldier, who had hunted the freebooter down, took charge of the lad, provided for his education; and when, two years afterwards, he sailed for England, he deposited £400 as a provision for the boy's future.

CHAPTER V

THE MAHRATTAS

"I offered you peace upon terms of equality, and honourable to all parties. You have chosen war, and are responsible for all the consequences."—WELLINGTON *to* SCINDIA.

IN his administration of Mysore, Wellesley came into contact with many instances of malad-ministration, or of corruption, on the part of the servants of the Company, and it kindled in him a stern anger which found very terse expression. "I intend," he wrote, "to ask to be brought away with the army if any civil servant of the Company is to be here, or any person with civil authority who is not under my orders, for I know that the whole is a system of job and corruption from beginning to end, of which I and my troops will be made the instruments."

Wellesley's share of prize-money in the Mysore campaign exceeded £4000; by no means a bad return for a campaign of two months. For his services against the "King of the World," again, he was made a special grant of £4000. And yet, curiously enough, he was impoverished, and almost

reduced to bankruptcy, by the expenses of his position. On June 14, 1799, he wrote to the Governor-General: "About six weeks ago I was sent in here with a garrison, consisting of about half the army, and a large staff, and I have not received a shilling more than I did at Fort St. George. The consequence is that I am ruined. . . . I should be ashamed of doing any of the dirty things that I am told are done in some of the commands in the Carnatic, as I believe I sufficiently proved at Wallajah-Nuggur; but if the Government do not consider my situation here, I must either give up the command or be ruined for ever. I assure you that since December I have in some months spent five times, in others four times, more than I received."[1]

Lord Mornington, who had a proud standard of honour, had refused to accept the sum of £100,000 voted to him by the Court of Directors as his share of the Seringapatam prize-money; a shining contrast to Clive, who, it must be remembered, accepted £160,000, and an annuity of £27,000 a year for life, as a reward for placing Meer Jaffer on the throne of Bengal. But he was stung to sharp anger by the action of the Court of Directors in issuing an order for the reduction of Wellesley's allowance as Governor of Mysore. "The Court," he wrote to the Prime

[1] "Supplementary Despatches," i. p. 246.

Minister, ". . . has offered me the most direct, marked, and disgusting personal indignity which could be devised." The act of the Directors seemed to imply that he had betrayed the public interest to fill the pockets of his brother; and, in his resentment, he tendered his resignation, and only consented, after earnest entreaties, to retain office till 1804.

In May, 1800, Wellesley was offered the command of an expedition against Batavia. It appealed strongly to his ambition and love of independent command; but he was engaged in the task of re-establishing order in the Mysore, and to give up that task might mean injury to the public interest; and care for the public interest was for him a sort of religion. He put himself into the hands of Lord Clive,[1] and asked him to decide, on public grounds, whether he ought to accept the offer; and Lord Clive, naturally concerned for Indian interests, decided against its acceptance. In October of the same year Wellesley was appointed to the command of a force of 5000 troops, which was to embark at Trincomalee, for an expedition against the Mauritius, or to form part of the movement under Abercrombie against the French in Egypt.

While the destination of the force was still unsettled, Wellesley was busy at Trincomalee, completing its organisation and equipment; and early in 1801

[1] Son of the famous Robert Clive, and then Governor of Madras.

despatches reached Lord Clive, directing the expedition to sail for Egypt. Lord Clive communicated the news to Wellesley, and he, on his own authority, at once embarked his force and sailed for Bombay. It was a daring step. He was moving his troops without instructions. But the act was wise, since at Bombay the troops could be provisioned and placed in transports with the utmost economy of time. In the meanwhile, however, the military authorities seem to have reflected that the expedition was on too great a scale to be placed in charge of an officer of less rank than major-general, and Baird had been nominated to the chief command, with Wellesley as his second. Baird arrived in haste at Trincomalee to assume charge of affairs, and found that his troops had already sailed; and he was in the mortifying position of a general without an army. The Governor-General naturally, and officially, shared in Baird's indignation. Wellesley, on the other hand, keenly resented being superseded, and placed second in command to an officer with whom pleasant relations would be difficult. Many years afterwards he wrote concerning the whole incident: "I take the truth to have been that the general officers of superior rank remonstrated [against a junior officer being placed in command of the expedition]. This was very right. I am not surprised at it. I never was. But the Governor-General, having made the appointment, ought to have had strength to adhere

to it. It was of the unexplained supersession that I complained. . . . I considered myself, and believe I was, very ill-used by the Government. In point of fact, I had from that time no communication with the Governor-General, until I negotiated and signed the treaty of peace."[1]

It was an additional grievance to Wellesley that he had incurred great personal expense in preparation for the expedition, and had gathered round him a considerable staff; and these officers suffered injury by the sudden transfer of the command to Baird. He wrote to Henry Wellesley: "I can easily get the better of my own disappointment, but how can I look in the face of the officers who, from a desire to share my fortunes, gave up lucrative appointments, and must go with one whom none of them admires? I declare that I can't think of the whole business with common patience."

Wellesley, however, was a good soldier, and promised loyal co-operation with Baird; but he fell ill with fever, and, later, had a troublesome attack of what was called the Malabar itch. Mental vexation was probably at the root of both ailments. Later news showed that the expedition would probably reach Egypt too late for active service, and Wellesley gave up his post under Baird. As it happened the *Susanna*, the transport in which he was to have sailed, was lost on the voyage. But for that happy

[1] Apsley House MSS., quoted by Sir Herbert Maxwell, vol. i. p. 34.

touch of the "Malabar itch" he might, instead of the stately tomb in the crypt of St. Paul's, have found a nameless and wandering grave in the Indian Ocean.

Baird sailed to Egypt, where he arrived just in time to miss the battle of Alexandria; and Wellesley resumed his duties at Seringapatam—with Assaye, though he knew it not, only six months distant.

When Tippoo Sahib fell, the one remaining peril, alike to the British dominions and to the general peace of India, was the great Mahratta Confederacy, north of the Godavery. Its authority stretched right across India, from the narrow strip of British territory on the east coast of the Bay of Bengal, to the Indus on the west, and north as far as the Himalayas. The nominal head of the Confederacy was the Peishwa, Badjee Rao, with his capital at Poonah. He was, however, little more than a shadow. The real strength of the Confederacy was divided betwixt Scindia, Holkar, and the Rajah of Berar, who ruled over an immense stretch of territory betwixt Bengal and the Deccan. The Rajah had a force of 20,000 good horsemen and 10,000 disciplined infantry. Scindia, with Agra and Delhi as his strongholds, was of still greater strength, and was able to put in the field a formidable army of 30,000 infantry, and 8000 cavalry, with guns, which the French adventurer, Perron, had organised in the rich stretch of country between the Jumna and the

Ganges. Holkar had a force under his flag 80,000 strong, largely officered by French. Had these three chiefs frankly united, and acted on a common plan, they might have swept over India, and submerged all their rivals; but they were torn into fragments by rival ambitions, by household quarrels, and by unforgetting hatreds.

Holkar, the fiercest and most daring of these chiefs, defeated his rivals in battle. The Peishwa fled into British territory, and took refuge in Bassein, while Holkar set up his stern rule in Poonah. All the Mahratta chiefs appealed to the British for alliance; but the Peishwa, the most helpless of the group, anticipated his rivals, and signed the famous Bassein treaty with the Governor-General, "the most momentous compact," as it has been called, "ever concluded by the Anglo-Indian Government." Under it Lord Mornington agreed to reinstate the Peishwa at Poonah, and maintain him against all attacks. The Peishwa placed his relations with all other states under the control of the British Government, undertook to employ no Europeans hostile to the British, and agreed to assign territory sufficient to meet the cost of a subsidiary force to be commanded by British officers. The terms were those already accepted by the Nizam, and they formed the pattern of all subsequent treaties with the native states.

The treaty of Bassein certainly represented a new

political ideal. Cornwallis had aimed at making the East India Company one of a cluster of independent sovereignties in India. He trusted to the race superiority of the British, their proved fighting power, their settled continuous policy, for the maintenance of a moral empire over the native states, and the preservation of a general political equilibrium. The Company, he believed, would be able to protect its allies, and hold in awe its enemies by such intangible forces as these. Cornwallis himself had broken the power of Tippoo, and reduced his dominions, and he hoped that object-lesson would be of enduring value.

But that expectation was idle. Lord Mornington found Tippoo a deadly and implacable foe, and he had to destroy him. The Mahratta Confederacy remained a standing menace to the peace of India, and the treaty of Bassein was designed to meet it. Mornington had a keener vision, as well as a more daring spirit, than Cornwallis. He held that it was not sufficient to create a British Empire *in* India; there must be a British Empire *of* India; and by the treaty of Bassein he created a system of subsidiary alliances, which broke up finally the Mahratta Confederacy. It assured to British power a supreme influence over the native states. It was a final bar to French interference. It did not rob the native states of their independence, but aimed to make the British the supreme judge betwixt them.

Scindia and the Rajah professed to accept the treaty of Bassein, though the fiercer spirit of Holkar rejected it; but it was certain that no dependence could be placed on any of the Mahratta chiefs. The British prepared to fulfil their agreement with the Peishwa, and replace him at Poonah, but Scindia and the Rajah joined their forces at Berhampore, and from it they menaced the territories of the Nizam.

The general plan of campaign on the part of the British was daring. If opposed to a European enemy it would have been fatally rash, for it scattered its detachments over a vast area. In the north, Lake, with 14,000 men, was to deal with the formidable army Perron had drilled; a division from Bombay, 7000 strong, was to watch Surat and Baroda on the north-west; an expedition from Calcutta, under General Harcourt, was to invade Cuttack. Three corps of reserve were detailed, one to guard Poonah, a second to keep watch on the Kistna, a third to defend the valley of the Ganges. In the south, Wellesley, with 23,000 men, was to move upon the Nurbuddah, where the armies of Scindia and the Rajah were concentrating. It was a very spacious strategy, and Wellesley's brain was chiefly responsible for it.

"The line in Mahratta affairs is taken," wrote Malcolm on New Year's Day, 1803, "and it is the most politic, as it is evidently the most just, pro-

ceeding that could have been adopted. . . . There can be no doubt of obtaining all that we can wish, both for ourselves and the Nizam, at the same time that we secure—what is the great object—the peace of the Peninsula; which, till that event takes place, must be periodically disturbed by such freebooters as Scindia and Holkar, whom nothing but the terror of the British arms will ever cause to desist from their ruinous incursions into the countries which lie to the south of Nurbuddah."

CHAPTER VI

A NEW CAMPAIGN

"The man of long-enduring blood,
The statesman-warrior, moderate, resolute,
Whole in himself, a common good."—TENNYSON.

WELLESLEY broke camp at Hurryhur on March 9, and after a march of nearly 600 miles, covered in less than forty days, effected a junction with Stevenson's troops on April 15. One of Holkar's captains was holding Poonah, and Wellesley's approach to that city enabled him to judge of the character of Mahratta warfare. After crossing the Kistna he wrote: "They have not left a stick standing within a distance of 150 miles from Poonah. . . . Excepting in one village I have not seen a living creature since I left the neighbourhood of Merrilah."

When within sixty miles of Poonah, Wellesley learned that the Mahrattas meant to burn that city before leaving it. At the moment the news reached him he had completed a long day's march, and his footsore infantry were exhausted; to save the city seemed impossible. But it was exactly

such a crisis which brought out Wellesley's gift for swift and daring action. He allowed his men to rest for a few hours, then, selecting 400 of his best mounted cavalry, he pressed on, without halting, for thirty-two hours, till he reached the city. The Mahrattas rode out of its gates on the news of his approach, and that forced march saved Poonah.

The Peishwa was installed in his capital, and Wellesley spent some busy weeks in preparing for the campaign which he knew to be inevitable. He refitted his artillery, gathered magazines for his troops, constructed basket boats, enlisted a corps of boatmen, and made his transport perfect. He knew that in the coming struggle swiftness of movement and certainty of supplies were the conditions of success. "I have made," he wrote to General Stuart, on January 2, "150 wheels since I came here." Wheels counted for almost as much as bayonets in a campaign against Mahratta horsemen.

Wellesley's position, meanwhile, was trying. The Peishwa could not be trusted. He broke every promise, withheld all assistance, and sent secret information of Wellesley's plans to the Mahratta chiefs. Scindia and the Rajah had joined forces in Wellesley's front, and were evidently waiting, until the rivers fell, to break in on the Nizam's frontiers, and set in motion a vast campaign of plunder

carrying on with Wellesley, meanwhile, that evasive diplomacy in which Indian genius excels.

The problem for Wellesley was how to crush Scindia and the Rajah without uniting against himself all the fragments of the Mahratta confederacy. For the scale of the Mahratta power must be remembered. The Mahratta territories covered an area of nearly a thousand miles square, the whole of what is called Hindustan proper—that part of India north of the Nurbuddah. It had a population of nearly 40,000,000, of whom nine-tenths were Mahratta in blood and Hindu in faith. If crystallised into unity by any wave of fanaticism, or set in general movement by the impact of a suddenly realised community of interest, and of peril, it might well have taxed even British power to the breaking point. Wellesley knew, too, that all the lesser Mahratta chiefs were watching the struggle betwixt the great powers, and waiting to join one or the other, according as it seemed likely to be victorious. For the Mahrattas, like Providence as Napoleon interpreted it, were always anxious to be on the side of the strongest battalions.

In the negotiations he conducted from Poonah, Wellesley strained every nerve, and employed every argument, to secure peace. "I am confident," he wrote, "that our resources will not be found insufficient for this war; yet it is our duty to the country to avoid it if we can do so with honour."

He was a great soldier. War, to him, meant a career. But even to his soldierly judgment, peace was a better thing than victory.

Early in July, Lord Mornington conferred on General Lake, in Northern India, and on Wellesley at Poonah, full political powers, and authorised them to take any action necessary to maintain the treaty of Bassein, and to protect the states for whose safety the British had made themselves responsible.

It is unnecessary to dwell on Lake's operations against Perron. They were brilliant and decisive in the highest degree, for Lake, while not such a master of war as Wellesley, had something of his faculty for swift movement and fierce strokes. The result of his campaign was the overthrow of French influence, and the shutting of Southern India against Scindia.

Wellesley, on his part, acted with equal decision. He called upon Scindia and the Rajah to prove the sincerity of their protestations of friendship by retiring to Nagpore. "There appears," he wrote to Scindia, "to be no occasion for assembling your army, and joining it with that of the Rajah of Berar on the Nizam's frontier." He offered to withdraw his own troops to their usual stations as soon as he had learned that Scindia had fallen back beyond the Nurbuddah. But the Mahratta chiefs still played an evasive game. They would retire to

Berhampore, they explained, when the British had reached their stations in Madras, Seringapatam, and Bombay. Wellesley's answer had the edge and the impact of a sword-stroke: "I offered you peace," he wrote, "upon terms of equality, and honourable to all parties. You have chosen war, and are responsible for all the consequences." And he was was not a man to use brave words without following them up with swift action. He wrote these words on August 6; on August 8 he was marching on Ahmadnagar. He captured it on August 11, formed a junction with Stevenson on September 21, and fought the battle of Assaye on September 23. The mere dates show the energy of Wellesley's movements. In six weeks he had shattered the strength of the Mahratta confederacy, and captured their strongest fortress.

Wellesley's power to forecast events, again, is shown by his letter to Lake of July 29. "My plan of operations," he wrote, "is to attack Ahmadnagar with my own corps, by the possession of which place I shall secure communication with Poonah and Bombay. . . . When I have finished that operation, and have crossed the Godavery, I shall then, if possible, bring the enemy to action." On July 29, that is, Wellesley described with precise accuracy what he would do—and did—on September 23.

On August 8, Wellesley was in front of Ahmad-

nagar. Wellesley himself describes it as, "excepting Vellore, the strongest country fort that I have seen." Colonel Welch, in his "Reminiscences," calls it "one of the strongest in India," with lofty bastions and a deep, dry ditch. It was armed with sixty guns. It was evening when the British came in sight of the fort. "We had not hitherto," says Welch, "seen the face of an enemy, but now the walls of both the pettah—the native town—and fort were lined with men whose arms glittered in the sun." There was no time to plant batteries. Wellesley sent forward his stormers against the pettah, having first pointed out to the leaders where they were to fix their ladders.

The assault was gallantly led; but within ten minutes five of the officers leading the first attacking party were killed or wounded, the ladders were thrown down and broken; the attack had failed. Another attacking party had only two ladders; the rush of the stormers broke down one; but, on the other, the stormers, headed by Captain Vesey, forced their way up. About 150 men had gained the rampart when a cannon-shot smashed the ladder. The fate of the stormers, thus cut off, might have seemed hopeless; but they leaped down the inner side of the wall, forced their way through the streets to the central gate, against which another party of stormers was battering on the outside, opened it, let in their comrades, and the town was won.

Wellesley himself told Gleig one striking incident in the attack. He says:

"Having made the necessary arrangements beforehand, I let loose the storming party. As I was watching the progress of things, I saw an officer seize a ladder, plant it against the wall, and rush up alone. He was thrown down on reaching the summit, but jumped up at once, and re-ascended; he was again thrown down, and again re-ascended, followed on this occasion by the men. There was a scuffle on the top of the wall, in which the officer had to cut his way through the defenders, and presently a whole crowd of British troops poured after him into the town. As soon as I got in, I made inquiries about him, and found that his name was Colin Campbell, and that he was wounded. I sought him out, and said a few words to him, with which he seemed greatly delighted. I liked his blunt, manly manner, and never lost sight of him afterwards."[1]

Campbell had his share in all the hard fighting of those stormy days, from Vimiero to Waterloo, and rose high. But it is the glimpse we catch of him through Wellington's eyes which makes him an enduring memory.

The moment the town was won, Wellesley opened fire with his guns on the fort, and the fire was so fierce that negotiations for surrender were begun. Wellesley announced that he would negotiate as long as his opponent liked; but meanwhile his guns should talk. He would not stop their fire for a moment.

The fort was surrendered. The capitulation gave the victor ample stores and a secure line of advance, inter-

[1] Gleig, "Reminiscences," pp. 35, 36.

posed a barrier betwixt the Mahrattas and Southern India, and had all the prestige of a successful first stroke—of greater value to Wellesley, possibly, than anything else Ahmadnagar yielded him. A letter written by a Mahratta chief to a friend after the assault on the pettah shows the impression a stroke so swift and fierce had made on the Indian mind. "The English," he says, "are a strange people, and their general an extraordinary man. They arrive here in the morning, examine the walls, carry them, have killed all the garrison in the place, and have now gone back to breakfast. Who can resist such men as these?"

The fall of Ahmadnagar stirred the Mahrattas into action, and Scindia and the Rajah put their huge forces in motion. Wellesley, on his part, was too good a soldier to waste time; no commander ever better understood the value of swiftness in war. Moreover, he was pricked into activity by anxiety as to his supplies. He wrote on August 24: "Twelve days have elapsed since I took Ahmadnagar, and in that time I have marched nearly fifty miles, and have crossed the river Godavery, . . . but I tremble for the want of the common country grains for the followers and cattle. . . . We have lost such numbers of cattle by the length of our march, and starvation, that we have none to carry grain for our followers." Even Wellesley's ingenuity of resource was strained to the breaking-point by that con-

stant and universal difficulty in Indian warfare, the task of finding supplies, not only for the armed forces, but for the innumerable followers of an army.

But he contrived somehow to keep his troops in perfect efficiency. "I never was in such marching trim," he writes to Malcolm, on September 6. "I marched, the other day, twenty-three miles in seven and a half hours, and all our marches are now made at the rate of three miles an hour."

Wellesley knew, too, the importance of striking hard, as well as swiftly, at the enemy. "If we begin," he wrote, "by a long, defensive warfare, and go looking after convoys which are scattered over the face of the earth, and do not attack briskly, we shall soon be in distress."

Meanwhile, Stevenson joined Wellesley at Budnapore. The Godavery had fallen, and was fordable everywhere, and Wellesley feared that the Mahratta horsemen would make a dash southward on Hyderabad. Scindia, however, was bringing up his guns and infantry, and Wellesley learned this with grim satisfaction. Their guns would make the march of Scindia's forces slow, and the infantry would be, in Wellesley's words, "something solid to go upon."

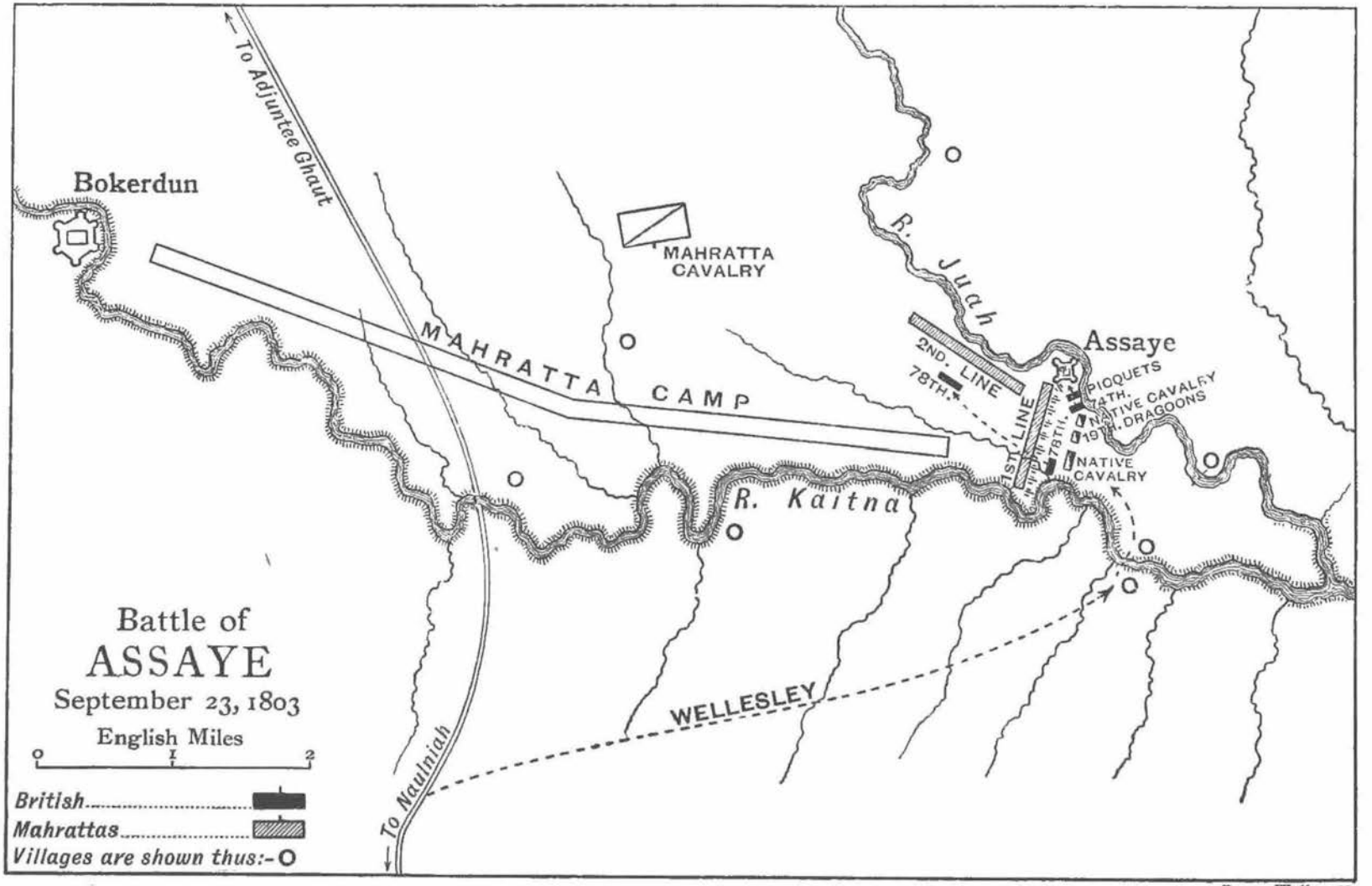
CHAPTER VII

ASSAYE

"This is he that far away
Against the myriads of Assaye
Clashed with his fiery few, and won."—TENNYSON.

THE Mahratta horsemen and guns were understood to be on the river Kaitna, near Bokardun, and between the hostile armies rose the chain of heights that runs back from the right bank of the Poonah. There were two passes through the hills, separated from each other by a distance of eight miles, and Wellesley had to choose whether he should divide his forces—always a perilous step in the presence of an enemy—and make use of both defiles; or keep his army together and attempt the passage by one defile only. But this plan would leave the other pass open to be seized by the enemy, who might thus evade his stroke. It meant delay, too, for it was impossible for the whole army to pass by one defile in a single day.

Wellesley took the more daring course. He sent Stevenson by the western pass, and himself took


To Adjuntee Ghaut
Bokerdun
MAHRATTA CAVALRY
R. Juah
Assaye
2ND. LINE
78TH.
1ST. LINE
78TH.
PIQUETS
74TH.
NATIVE CAVALRY
19TH. DRAGOONS
NATIVE CAVALRY
MAHRATTA CAMP
R. Kaitna
WELLESLEY
To Naulniah
Battle of
ASSAYE
September 23, 1803
English Miles
0 1 2
British
Mahrattas
Villages are shown thus:- O
Emery Walker sc.

that to the east. The two divisions were to unite on the northern slopes of the hills, and fall on both flanks of the Mahrattas.

On September 22 Wellesley set his forces in motion through the defile. When he emerged from the pass he found himself, with Stevenson still out of sight, in front of the whole Mahratta army —a force of 50,000 men—with 128 guns, drawn up in a position of ideal strength. Their whole front was covered by the Kistna, a deep stream, with rugged banks: the Juah covered their rear; the angle formed by the junction of the Kistna and the Juah seemed to make an attack on their left wing impossible. On the Mahratta right was their magnificent cavalry, 20,000 horsemen. Assaye, a fortified village, was on the Juah in the left rear of the Mahratta lines. With a force consisting of 5000 men—only 2000 of them British—and 18 guns, Wellesley thus found himself in front of an army ten times greater than his own, and holding a position of what seemed enormous strength. Wellesley's force, too, had already marched twenty-four miles. His infantry were foot-weary; his gun-teams were almost exhausted. It was a moment to tax to the utmost the genius and the courage of even a great commander.

But Wellesley did not hesitate. The secret of successful war in India, he knew, was daring and instant attack. Perhaps he thought of Clive at

Plassey; but, if so, he knew nothing of that pause of agonising doubt during which both Clive's fame and the fate of the British in India hung in suspense.

In his despatch, Wellesley simply writes, "It was obvious that the attack was to be no longer delayed." He says nothing about the swift, anxious balance of overwhelming risks which he must have made. His mind reached a decision so quickly, and with such unclouded certainty, that all he thinks it necessary to say is that it was "obvious" that he must attack.

The plan of battle took shape in his quick brain almost in an instant. He would strike at the left of his enemy's line, where his infantry was drawn up. The space betwixt the Kistna and the Juah was so narrow that it would give no room for the huge mass of Mahratta horsemen to charge, in their tumultuous fashion, for the rescue of their footmen and guns. But how was he to reach his enemy? His Indian guides assured him that there was no ford across the Kistna. Two tiny clusters of houses on either side of the stream, however, caught Wellesley's sure vision. There must be some communication, he guessed, between those groups of houses on opposite sides of the stream. When afterwards complimented on this guess, as a stroke of tactical inspiration, he replied, "No, that was common-sense." But it was common-

sense founded on a knowledge of human nature. And, risking everything on the probability of striking a ford at this point, Wellesley set his tiny force moving across the whole front of the enemy.

The Mahrattas—a long front of serried battalions, pricked with guns—the massed squadrons of horsemen on their right, with the great ditch of the Kistna in front—here was a battle array such as India had perhaps never before seen; and yet across that far-stretching and hostile front, gay with strange colours, and gleaming with restless points of steel, the little oblong of Wellington's men marched with steady tramp. It was a terrier going to attack an elephant. It seemed as if the Mahratta generals had only to let their cavalry loose, and send them across the river, to overwhelm the British.

But the enemy did not move. The British kept on their deliberate and audacious march, and the Mahrattas apparently failed to guess—or guessed too late—the point towards which Wellesley was striking. "For a length of time," says Wellesley in his despatch, "they did not see my infantry or discover my design. . . . Luckily they did not occupy the ford; if they had I must have gone lower down, and possibly have been obliged to make a route across the river."

The river was reached; down the nearer bank the infantry hurried; they splashed, battalions of

white faces and dark faces in turn, through the stream, with the Mahratta guns thundering against them. The swift current rose to their waists, but it was a true ford, and the chain of broken companies—a thread of breathless men—clambered up the steep ascent on the farther side. As they gained the summit, every man's eyes turned to the left. They saw the enemy's lines swinging back at right angles to their original direction, so as to form a barrier stretching from the Kistna to the Juah. These dark-faced, French-drilled thousands, it was clear, could manœuvre! The movement was executed swiftly, and with precision, and the Mahratta infantry stretched, a living wall, across the whole interval betwixt the two streams—a little less than a mile—their guns wheeling into place and opening fire.

But what the Mahrattas needed, at that moment, was not the mechanical art of the drill-sergeant, but the impulse of a courageous generalship. They had not learnt the first lesson in soldiership—to attack. They should have flung themselves on Wellesley's men as they clambered up in disorder out of the river, and before they had time to form. Instead of doing that they remained on the defensive, and when the Kistna was crossed, all the advantages of position on the part of the Mahrattas were cancelled. The immense superiority of the Mahrattas in cavalry,

too, was rendered useless. They had no room to charge. Their own infantry filled the whole space betwixt the rivers. Nothing parted the two hosts but a little stretch of level field, sprinkled with bushes, and "the fiery few" of Tennyson's ode could clash with Scindia's Mahrattas on equal terms.

Something more, indeed, than the advantage of position was already lost to the Mahrattas. That spectacle of 50,000 waiting to be attacked by 5000 was in itself an admission that the 5000, so startlingly inferior in numbers, were superior in fighting quality to their enemies.

Wellesley's guns had by this time practically fallen out of the fight — or, rather, had been unable to reach it. Many of his bullock teams were exhausted, others were shot. He had nothing but his infantry and his scanty cavalry on which to depend. His plan of battle was simple. He would hold back his right—so as to keep it out of the zone of fire from the village of Assaye—and swing forward his left, thus pushing the Mahratta line back upon the deep ravine beyond the village. "I knew," he wrote in his despatches, "that the village of Assaye must fall when their right should be beat."

But one of those blunders that are inevitable in a battle marred this plan. The 78th Highlanders and the Sepoys advanced with heavy musketry volleys, and then charged with the

bayonet. The first line of the enemy was broken, the Mahratta guns were abandoned. The officer commanding the leading troops on Wellesley's right, however, failed to understand his commander's plan of holding back that part of his line, and using it as a pivot from which to swing forward his left. Or perhaps the tumult of battle on his left had kindled the fighting impulse in this officer's blood, for he led his men straight on Assaye, coming within the flame of its guns. It was a gallant blunder, but a very costly one. The ground across which the 78th charged was swept like a glacis by the enemy's fire. The 74th followed the lead of the 78th, with the result that Wellesley's front was broken, his second line uncovered, and the unfortunate advance party, with the 74th Highlanders following, found themselves in a hell of converging fire which almost destroyed them. Of one company, consisting of an officer and fifty men, all but six of the rank and file were struck down. Every officer of the 74th present, except the quartermaster, was either killed or wounded. Wellesley said afterwards, "I do not wish to cast any reflection upon the officer who led the piquets; I lament the consequences of his mistake; but I must acknowledge that it was not possible for a man to lead a body into a hotter fire than he did the piquets that day against Assaye."

The Mahratta horse saw in the gap visible in Wellington's line their opportunity and came on, their dark faces bent forward, in fierce charge. Then Wellesley flung his scanty cavalry, the 19th Light Dragoons and a regiment of native cavalry, into the fight. The Light Dragoons and the brown-faced Sowars rode side by side at a gallop, cheering as they went, and cheered by the British wounded lying thick in the track of the 74th. The charge was driven furiously home; the Mahrattas could not stand the shock of the British squadrons; they broke, and were driven off in a whirlwind of flight, and the British cavalry, finely led, rode in upon the enemy's batteries.

Meanwhile, in a curious fashion, the fight re-kindled in the rear of the victorious British left. The 78th and the Sepoys had swept back the first line of the Mahratta infantry, who abandoned their guns. But the Mahratta gunners simply flung themselves on the ground, and allowed the feet of the charging British to trample over them. Then they leaped up, swung their guns round, and opened fire on the British line. Maxwell, who commanded Wellesley's cavalry, re-formed his squadrons, and he rode with them upon these "resurrection men." There was great slaughter, and Maxwell himself fell.

The steady and overpowering advance of Wellesley's left by this time had flung back the Mahratta

infantry into the rough and deep ravine of the Juah. They broke, and poured across the nullah, a mob of fugitives. The 78th carried Assaye with the bayonet, and by six o'clock the battle was over. It began at three, and in that brief space of time a great army had been shattered to fragments, the strength of the Mahratta Confederacy overthrown, and Wellesley had won one of the most remarkable victories in Indian history. The Mahrattas left 1200 dead on the field; nearly their whole camp equipage, with more than 100 guns, fell into the hands of the victors. Of the British force, numbering 8000—of whom only 5000 took part in the actual fighting—79 officers and 1778 soldiers were killed or wounded. Every third man in the British ranks was hit.

The Mahrattas fought well. Wellesley himself described the fight to Croker, afterwards, as "the bloodiest for the numbers I ever saw." "If I had not taken that sudden resolution to attack," he added, "we were, I assure you, in a most dangerous predicament." The picturesque feature of the battle—the manner in which the captured guns, over which the British line had swept, with levelled bayonets, were turned against the rear of their captors by the Mahratta gunners, proves—if proof were needed—how bravely the enemy fought.

"The battle," wrote Wellesley again, "was the most obstinate that I have ever seen, and which I believe has ever been fought in India. . . .

I have no language strong enough to express the admirable conduct of the [British] troops. They moved in the best order, and with the greatest steadiness under the most murderous fire."

Sir William Fraser says that when Napoleon heard of Assaye, he said, "This is the man with whom I shall have to deal." The story hardly sounds true; and yet Napoleon, with his keen eye, could hardly have glanced at the landscape of the fight at Assaye without discovering in it the work of a great commander. Assaye has a more distinct physiognomy, indeed, than perhaps any other of Wellington's battles. It was, on any reading, a great battle; in some respects a greater battle than Plassey. Clive, it is true, had only 4000 men against 50,000, while Wellesley had 8000 against the same number. But Clive knew in advance that one-half of the force he was about to attack would desert their flags. The mere arithmetic of the losses proves how much sterner was the fighting at Assaye than at Plassey. At Plassey the British losses only reached 50; at Assaye the killed and wounded in the British ranks rose to nearly 2000, more than one-third of the number that actually took part in the fight.

Assaye, it must be repeated, was a great battle; and it could be described, without challenge, as the battle of a great general, if all that happened, say, before three o'clock on the day of the fight could be forgotten. But it is clear that whether he was

surprised at Waterloo or not, Wellesley was certainly taken by surprise at Assaye. He stumbled upon his enemy unexpectedly. Wellesley himself apologises for this by insisting on the difficulty of reconnoitring an Indian army, with its fringe of light horse. But an army of 50,000, with 128 guns, is a big target; and when known to be within striking distance, Wellesley ought to have been sure as to its exact position.

The list of things which a good general ought not to do, but which, in this fight, Wellesley did, is, as a matter of fact, both long and startling. He divided his force in the presence of the enemy, so that he had to fight a desperate battle with one-half his army twelve miles distant. He brought his men to the actual shock of conflict weary with a march of twenty-four miles, and with half his guns incapable of coming into action. The march across four miles of the enemy's front—the slow tramp of tired troops across the face of an army six times greater than itself—and within the stride of its cavalry, was a mere tempting of fate. In the fight itself, Wellesley attacked the enemy's guns with infantry. He used up his own cavalry before the fate of the battle was known. If war were like a question in arithmetic, to be decided by abstract rules, and with factors of unchanging value, then Assaye ought to have been a defeat.

But Wellesley was in a position where rules could

not serve him; and he showed that genius which is above rules. "In all great actions," according to his own words, "there is risk"; and at Assaye Wellesley had to balance the risks. Retreat probably meant ruin; delay was a mere invitation to disaster. Safety, not to say victory, lay in the direction of instant attack. And, given the resolve to attack, all that followed—the march across the enemy's front, the desperate adventure of the ford, the attack on the enemy's guns with the bayonet—followed necessarily. Wellesley's genius is shown in his instant determination to attack, and in the flash of inspired common-sense which made him guess at a ford which his native guides assured him did not exist. Assaye, as Wellesley explains it, was a battle won by a guess. "I fought and won the battle, the bloodiest for the numbers I ever saw; and this was all by the common-sense guess that men do not build villages without some means of communication betwixt them." And Wellesley risked his army, and the fate of India, on that guess.

His title to fame—the proof of his genius as a commander—is to be found in the fact that he read with profound insight what may be called the invisible factors of the problem. He assessed, and assessed truly, the limitation of his enemies. They would not guess his plan, or the point towards which his tiny force was moving, till too late. They would not have initiative enough to march to the ford,

line the river bank with their guns, and make the passage of the river impossible. And when the actual shock of battle came, Wellesley knew that the bayonets of his infantry would overpower the Mahratta guns. Assaye, in a word, was won in the cells of Wellesley's brain before a shot was fired. The swift decision, the instant stroke, the clear, unhesitating tactics, all gave a cumulative momentum to the British force. It left Wellesley's 5000 men no leisure to meditate on the 50,000 before them. And the mere fact that the British were attacking gave them a moral superiority to their foes which was final. "In war," said Napoleon, "what is wanted is not men, but a man." And Wellesley was the man wanted at Assaye. Had he not been there it would never have been fought; or, if fought, would not have been won.

The Governor-General wrote to his brother in almost lyrical terms about the victory. "I declare to you most sincerely that you have infinitely surpassed all that I could have required from you in my public capacity, and have soared beyond the highest point to which all my affection, and all the pride of my blood, could have aspired. . . . Your battle is the equal in skill and fortitude to any of which the account exists in history. . . . Splendid, matchless as was your victory on the 23rd, it was not more than we expected from you."

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER ASSAYE

"The Mahrattas have not left a stick standing at the distance of 150 miles from Poonah. Excepting in one village I have not seen a human creature since I left Merrilah."—WELLESLEY.

WELLESLEY lost no time after Assaye. Stevenson, abandoning the pursuit of Scindia's broken host, marched to lay siege to Berhampoor and Asseghur; Wellesley meanwhile covering these sieges, watching over his convoys, and guarding the Nizam's frontier. Wellesley's sieges in India, as in the Peninsula, were always brief. The bayonet and the storming-party he held to be more effective than the slow approach of the engineers; and the Indian fortresses, though of great strength, were quickly captured. The business of guarding his convoys was more difficult, yet to him it was vital. But Wellesley's greatest difficulty arose from the treachery of the Peishwa, who broke every promise, betrayed every secret, embarrassed every operation, and was, in the British general's words, "our worst enemy under the guise of our best friend." "Since the battle of Assaye," he wrote, "I have been like a man who fights with

one hand and defends himself with the other." Scindia, on his part, finding Wellesley's stroke so swift that there was no escape from it, and his vigilance so keen that he could not be tricked, and tiring of a warfare which yielded no booty, sent in an agent to the British headquarters, on November 6, asking for a suspension of arms with a view to a treaty of peace.

Wellesley caught at the proposal. He feared that Scindia, falling back on characteristic Mahratta tactics, might let loose his swarms of horse upon his communications, and so harass his supplies. But a truce would shut them up in Scindia's own territory, and make their support a burden. The arrangement with Scindia, too, left the Rajah of Berar open to attack, and without an ally, for Wellesley sternly refused to suspend operations in Berar. "I know very well," he wrote, "that this cessation of arms is contrary to all rules, but under existing circumstances I believe the violation of these rules will be of more advantage to the public good than the observance of them." The condition of the truce was that Scindia should remove to a position forty miles east of Ellichpoor.

By leaving the Rajah out of his arrangements, Scindia separated his interests from those of his ally, and destroyed all confidence betwixt them, if any existed. "So," wrote Wellesley, "the confederacy becomes *ipso facto* dissolved." The terms

Wellesley urged his brother to grant to Scindia were daring, original, and profoundly wise. He urged that Scindia should not be required to disband his troops. This would be simply to resolve them into a flood of predatory bands, laying waste the country, or to dismiss them as allies to the nearest enemy of the British rule. The protected states generally, he urged, should be compelled to maintain their military power intact. This would secure order, it would prevent thousands of soldiers degenerating into banditti, and it would not mean any real peril to the British power. But Wellesley's advice was too courageous for even his strong-brained brother.

Scindia, meanwhile, was disloyal to the truce. He united his forces to those of the Rajah, and this junction threatened the operations which Stevenson had begun against Gawilghur. Wellesley moved promptly to cover Stevenson, and, on the very day their forces were united, from the tower of Parterley Wellesley saw Scindia's horsemen, a mass apparently countless in number, moving through clouds of dust towards their camp on the plain of Argaum.

The British columns had marched twenty-six miles already, day was wearing to its close, and Wellesley resolved to camp. But the Mahratta horsemen began to worry his piquets, and riding out to the front Wellesley could see at a distance

of about six miles the long lines of the combined Mahratta armies drawn up in battle array. He must attack, or be attacked, and he made his choice without hesitation.

He put his tired troops in movement—fourteen battalions of infantry, six regiments of cavalry, with a swarm of 4000 irregular horse—about 18,000 in all—and moved across the dusty plain towards the enemy's position. The Mahratta front stretched—a line of many-coloured turbans and glittering arms—for five miles. Scindia's cavalry, a vast multitude of horse, held the right, the Rajah's forces formed the centre and left. The whole force numbered 40,000; the plain in front was broken with garden enclosures, and cut up by watercourses.

Wellesley marched with his force in single column until within reach of the enemy, then he threw his infantry into line, with the cavalry in reserve, and advanced to the attack, pushing forward his right wing to turn the Mahratta left. The British moved in silence, and with great steadiness. Suddenly from right to left along the hostile front, with a roll as of thunder, the Mahratta guns broke into flame. The mere sound shook three battalions of Sepoys into instant flight, and Wellesley's line was broken. These battalions had shown splendid courage at Assaye, and had remained unshaken under a much heavier fire than that which now was smiting them; but perhaps it was the memory

of the terrible guns at Assaye which now swept them away in panic. Wellesley himself galloped amongst the flying men, and with fierce gestures and commands arrested their flight, drew them sharply into order again, and led them back to the broken line. "But if I had not been there," he says, "I am convinced the day would have gone quite against us." "What do you think," he wrote afterwards, "of nearly three entire battalions, who behaved so admirably in the battle of the Assaye, being broken and running off at the cannonade which commenced at Argaum, which was not to be compared to that of Assaye."

The British line now moved on again, and the Mahratta guns fell silent. A vast mass of horsemen was drawing free from their infantry and getting into shape to fling themselves on the British line. "The pause, when the enemy's guns ceased firing, and their cavalry advanced in front of them," says Colonel Welch, who took part in the fight, "was an awful one." One section of Scindia's cavalry, its *corps d'élite*, the "Arabs," as Welch calls them, a very imposing body, "singled out our two European regiments and charged them with tremendous shouts. A struggle ensued in which we killed and wounded about six hundred of these Arabs, and our corps took eight standards." "These Arabs," Wellesley says, "are undoubtedly the bravest troops I have yet seen in the service of the native powers." But

they flung themselves in vain on the unshaken line of British bayonets. The Mahratta horsemen fell back disordered and broken under the rolling volleys of the British infantry, and finally rode off in tumultous flight, disordering their own foot, which up to this time had kept their formation unbroken. But when once an eddy of retreat had become visible in the huge mass of Scindia's army, it crumpled up almost at a breath into general and distracted flight, leaving thirty-eight pieces of cannon on the field to the victors.

Three days after the battle, Wellesley moved on Gawilghur, the strongest place of arms under the Rajah's flag, and held to be impregnable. It stood in the heart of a tangle of hills, and Stevenson's division had to drag their heavy guns and waggons by ropes over thirty miles of rugged country to the siege. The batteries opened fire on December 12th; on the 17th the fortress was stormed. The Rajah was already negotiating for peace while the siege was in progress, but Wellesley refused to silence his guns while terms of peace were being arranged.

Malcolm gives an interesting sketch of Wellesley when he joined his camp after the victory of Argaum. He found that months of campaigning under Indian skies, the constant battle, not only of guns and bayonets against Mahratta horsemen, but of diplomacy against Indian subtlety and falsehood, had aged Wellesley. The strain of work

which he maintained himself, and enforced on his staff, the seriousness with which he took all duty, had left its mark on the very physiognomy of his headquarters. There was a grey sombreness, as well as a Spartan simplicity, about it. The personal staff that gathered round their chief at table in the evening consisted of exhausted men who had worked at high pressure all the day. Wellesley himself spoke little. He was brooding over the events of the day and the problems of to-morrow. He had a fashion of performing a sort of "sentry go"—a solitary preoccupied tramp to and fro—in front of his tent. So well known was this habit that the natives had a term for it—the "chehel cudum"—literally, the forty paces.

Malcolm, familiarly known as "the boy" amongst his associates, had an inextinguishable gaiety of spirit, and the effect of his presence in Wellesley's too serious headquarters is amusingly reflected in his journal. Laughter is a better tonic for weariness than wine; and laughter had become an almost forgotten sound in the group of men, under the strain of great affairs, round their chief. Malcolm joined Wellesley himself in his "sentry go" every evening, and his picture of the brooding mood and careworn face of Wellesley at the end of the Mahratta campaign helps to explain why, twelve months later, the victor of Assaye declared that "nothing on earth would induce him to remain longer in India."

A treaty of alliance was signed by the Rajah on December 7, and a similar treaty by Scindia on December 30. These treaties gave Delhi, Agra, Gwalior, and many other cities to the British flag; but the peace, as one incidental result, let loose thousands of Scindia's horsemen as mere bandits upon the unhappy country. They formed themselves into bands, and any soldier who became conspicuous for audacity quickly found himself at the head of what was little less than an army. One band rose swiftly into a bad pre-eminence. Its stronghold was on the Deccan frontier. It ravaged whole districts, and defeated one of the Nizam's columns sent out against it, capturing all its guns. If left unchecked, it promised quickly to require a campaign for its overthrow.

Wellesley took the matter in hand with characteristic energy. He organised a picked force, consisting of the 19th Light Dragoons, and three native regiments of cavalry, with a small force of infantry, and, crossing the Godavery, set out in pursuit. The country was difficult, the roads impassable, the guides could not be trusted; but Wellesley had an instinct for guessing the routes and the hiding-places of the Mahratta freebooters. Getting news of his enemy's whereabouts, he made a forced march of sixty miles in thirty hours, a third of it in the darkness. "The night," he wrote, "was dark, the road desperately bad, and my allies, like true

Mahrattas, gave the enemy information." But Wellesley reached the camp of the freebooters just as they were moving out of it, and he hung upon their tracks till he had destroyed them. "This," he wrote, "was the greatest exertion I ever saw troops make in any war. The infantry was in the attack, although we marched sixty miles between the morning of the 4th and 12 o'clock noon of the 5th February."

Many years afterwards, Wellesley told the story of that chase to Gleig:

"The fellow," he said, "was growing formidable when I set out in search of him. I was suffering at the time from boils, a not uncommon complaint, by-the-bye, in India, and riding was disagreeable, but I got upon my horse, and after a march of sixty miles, ascertained that he had managed to put a river between him and me, which the guides assured me was impassable. We pushed on across a large plain, and presently saw the river, which certainly had no bridges upon it, and looked very much as if it were too deep for fording. I noticed, however, that two villages stood directly opposite to one another, looking like a single village with a stream running through, and I said to myself, 'These people would not have built in this manner unless there was some means of communication from side to side.' I made no halt, therefore, and found, sure enough, that a very good ford allowed the inhabitants of one village to visit their neighbours in the other village at all hours of the day. We crossed by that ford, greatly to the disgust of our guides, who intended the robbers to get away, and overtaking the marauders, we attacked and dispersed them, taking all their guns and baggage. I knew that, without guns, and broken up as they were, they would be cut to pieces in detail by the armed villagers, and it was so."

According to this story, it was the sudden memory of the flash of insight to which he owed the victory at Assaye—the incident of seeing two villages on either side of a stream, and deducing the existence of a ford—which enabled him to crush this band of marauders; but it is curious that twice Wellesley should owe victory to such a guess.

CHAPTER IX

CLOSING YEARS IN INDIA

"I have served the Company in important situations for many years, and have never received anything but injury from the Court of Directors."—WELLESLEY.

WITH the destruction of that band of free-booters Wellesley's career as a soldier in India practically ended. There remained another year of Indian experience, during which he resumed his command in Mysore; but this period formed a part of his life in India on which Wellesley himself always looked back with profound disgust. He had fallen out of sympathy with his brother's policy towards the native states; the strain of the Indian climate was affecting his health. Some deep instinct turned his ambitions towards Europe. He persuaded himself that his services in India were not appreciated, and were inadequately rewarded, and he did not hesitate to say so, and to say it with bitter emphasis. He watched the campaigns of Lake against Holkar with critical eyes, and was profoundly disgusted with the disasters of Colonel Monson's ill-fated expedition.

Monson, it will be remembered, one of Lake's divisional commanders, had been left with a detachment 12,000 strong on guard at Molwah, 200 miles from Lake's headquarters. He was attacked by Holkar, and instead of flinging himself upon his enemy, Monson retreated. That retreat is one of the most tragical stories in Indian history. Of his whole force not one man in ten reached the gates of Agra alive. "Holkar's pursuit of Monson," says Hooper, "is still remembered where Assaye and Lasware are forgotten." Wellesley writes of Monson's "retreats, defeats, disgraces and disasters," as "the greatest and most disgraceful to our military character of any that ever occured." It happened because every method on which Wellesley himself acted was forgotten, and every rule of action which he taught as necessary in Indian warfare was broken.

Wellesley's letters at this time are bitter with discontent. "I do not conceive," he wrote to Malcolm, "that any man has a right to call upon me to remain in a subordinate position in this country, contrary to my inclination, only because it will suit his views, and will forward objects for which he has been labouring." He would remain in India, he protested, if the public good required it, but he had come to believe that he could best serve India by leaving it. Malcolm, writing to Shawe, says, "He (Wellesley) appears plagued with

a slow fever. He frets himself, which I never knew him to do before. . . . He thinks he has been shamefully used in not being put on the staff. . . . He goes lean."[1]

Yet it was during this very period—a period on which he was accustomed to look back with disgust—that Wellesley wrote many of those great despatches which have done almost as much for his fame as his battles. The Wellington despatches as a whole, from 1794 to 1832, fill nearly 15,000 large octavo pages. "They form," says Sir Herbert Maxwell, "one of the most remarkable achievements from a single hand that ever were penned"; and the Indian despatches, in some respects, are the most interesting of the whole series.

Early in February, 1805, Wellesley finally determined to leave India. Sir John Craddock, the Commander-in-Chief, urged him to remain. "You think about my staying in India," wrote Wellesley, "like a man who has just come out, and I like one who has been here for seven years, involved in perpetual troubles." He wrote to an agent to secure his passage. He explained he did not care a great deal about the price, nor about who the captain was, or what the ship. He was offered, however, a passage in H.M.S. *Trident*, and sailed from Madras in March, 1805, his departure being marked by a remarkable outburst of honours from

[1] "Life of Malcolm," vol. i. p. 300.

representatives of all races and creeds in India. "I was feasted out of Bombay," he wrote, "as I was feasted into it." Not the least remarkable of these expressions of regard was an address from the native inhabitants of Seringapatam. "You are entitled to our gratitude," it declared, "for the tranquillity, security, and prosperity which we have enjoyed under your beneficent administration. We address our prayers to the God of all castes and of all nations that He will grant you health, glory, and good fortune."

Wellesley's career in India, linked with that of his brother, gave a new complexion to British history in India. All the centres of French influence in India—at Hyderabad, Seringapatam, Delhi, and Poonah—were destroyed. The Peishwa, the nominal head of the Mahratta confederacy, had become little better than a British pensioner. Tippoo had been destroyed; Scindia, Holkar, and the Rajah of Berar had been brought under tribute. A map of India showing the British dominions when Wellesley landed in India, and a similar map showing the same dominions when he left India, are an amazing contrast to each other. In that brief period, British territories had been increased threefold in area and in wealth, British power had been multiplied tenfold; and to this result Lord Mornington's brilliant gifts at Government House contributed less than Wellesley's victories

in the field, and his diplomatic successes with the native princes.

But the two Wellesleys did more than carry the political fortunes of Great Britain in India to a new height; they changed the very temper of British administration; they purged it of that taint of corruption which undeniably existed. They created for it newer and loftier ideals. Both Hastings and Clive accepted large sums as gifts from native princes; and smaller men, with examples so illustrious to corrupt them, fell into evil habits. But Wellesley kept his hands clean, and he required all his agents to be clean-handed. He taught his officers to look upon the offer of a bribe as an insult. Lord Mornington refused to receive a grant of £100,000 from the Board of Directors. Wellesley was offered by the Minister of the Nizam a bribe of £70,000 for secret information as to the treaty in progress, and rejected the offer with a grim jest. He punished with the sternest severity acts of oppression on natives. "Truth-lover was our English Duke," says Tennyson in that magnificent ode which is perhaps the great soldier's noblest monument; and in the atmosphere of lying in which he lived in India Wellesley remained a truth-lover and a truth-speaker. "I would willingly," he once wrote, "give Gwalior ten times over, or all the other fortresses in India, rather than risk the loss of our reputation for

scrupulous good conscience. . . . What was it that kept me right amidst the embarrassments of the war, and of the negotiations which followed it? British good faith, and nothing else."

Of the political value of these qualities in Wellesley's character it is difficult to speak too highly. If Soult in Spain, Davoust in Holland, Masséna in Italy, or Loison in Portugal, had acted on Wellesley's principles, the course of history in Europe might have been changed. On the other hand, if Wellesley at Seringapatam, or at Poonah, had been as hungry for plunder, as unreliable in word, and as careless of human rights as some of Napoleon's marshals, there might have been no British empire in India to-day. The Wellesleys created a new standard of justice, honour, and conduct in Indian administration, and the impress of their high conception of duty is still felt in Indian affairs.

CHAPTER X

THE INDIAN DESPATCHES

"Truth-lover was our English Duke;
Whatever record leap to light
He never shall be shamed."—TENNYSON.

PERHAPS his famous "Despatches" are the mirror which most perfectly reflects Wellesley's character in India. In writing them he was creating an imperishable literature without knowing it. Of their unique quality, as literature, there is no doubt. As a record of the thoughts and methods of a great soldier, dealing with a thousand problems of war in detail, there is nothing else in English literature, or perhaps in the literature of any other language, that has the range, the vivid sense, the minuteness of practical detail, the wealth of thought and knowledge to be found in these "Despatches." The single missing element in them is the quality of imagination; the sudden illuminating vision that sees the whole landscape at a glance; the leap of thought which reaches a conclusion without the help of the intermediate processes. And that Wellesley did not know the

value of his "Despatches" is clear. He was filled with astonishment in after years as he read them. "I did not believe it possible," he wrote, "that a correspondence which I preserved at first solely as memoranda, and for reference, and afterwards from idleness and the desire to avoid the trouble of looking over the papers to see what might be destroyed, could ever be turned to a purpose so useful."

The India Despatches have a more personal note, and give a more intimate revelation of Wellesley's character and mental habits than even the Peninsula Despatches. He had less time for friendships in those later years; there were fewer with whom he could correspond on terms of equality; he was preoccupied with events on a great scale. In the India Despatches we see his character and genius in process of evolution. Of the India Despatches Wellesley himself said, forty years afterwards, "They are as good as I could write now. They show the same attention to details, to the pursuit of all the means, however small, that could promote success." And certainly, as a picture from the inside of a great general at work, these despatches have immortal interest.

He told Gleig that "we made war pretty much as Alexander the Great seems to have done, and as all men must do, in such a country as India then was"; and if we can forget the differences

of race and of weapons, and the twenty odd centuries betwixt, it is easy to imagine Alexander and his Greeks campaigning in India very much as Wellesley did, with the same swiftness of stroke, the same wrestle with natural difficulties, the same audacious attack on the many by the few, the same mastery of the men of a white race over men of a dark race. "We had no pontoons," says Wellesley; "we crossed the rivers either by fords or, when these failed us, by bridges resting upon inflated skins." But always with Wellesley, as it must have been with Alexander, there was the energy of intellect, the daring, the scorn of differences in numbers, the insight which taught him that on such a field, and against such foes, the swift courage which challenged all risks was safer, as well as wiser, than the prudence which stopped to weigh risks. His despatches are full of counsels which breathe this spirit:

"If the rebels are in force, let a junction be formed, and then not a moment lost in dashing at them, whatever may be their force. If the rebels are not in strength, let the troops be kept in constant motion in different directions, and let the alarm be kept up. Then they will never be in strength."[1]

"We must get the upper hand, and if once we have that we shall keep it with ease, and shall certainly succeed. But if we begin by a long defensive warfare, and go looking after convoys which are scattered over the face of the earth, and do not attack briskly, we shall soon be in distress."[2]

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[1] "Indian Despatches," p. 146. [2] Ibid., p. 290.

His method of dealing with the huge masses of horsemen, of which Indian armies are composed, is described:

"Large bodies move slowly, and it is not difficult to gain intelligence of their motions. A few rapid and well-combined movements made indirectly upon them, but with a view to prevent the execution of any favourite design, soon bring them to their bearings. They stop, look about them, begin to feel restless, and are obliged to go off."

Many of his despatches have an historic value as shedding light on the state of India at the end of the eighteenth century: "The whole of the Mahratta territory," he wrote, "is unsettled and in ruins. . . . Every man is a plunderer, and a thief, and no man who can find anything to seize or steal will cultivate the land for his subsistence."[1]

"Conceive a country in every village of which there are from twenty to thirty horsemen who have been dismissed from the service of the State, and have no means of living except by plunder. In this country there is no law, no civil government, and no armies to keep these plunderers in order. No revenue can be collected, no inhabitant can or will remain to cultivate unless he is protected by an armed force stationed in his village. This is the state of the countries of the Peishwa and the Nizam. . . . Habits of industry are out of the question. They must plunder for subsistence, or be destroyed, or starve, or be taken into the service of some of the allied Powers."[2]

"It is curious to know," he writes again, "that Scindia had English officers under his flag as well as French"; and these renegades, after renouncing

[1] "Indian Despatches," p. 268. [2] Ibid., p. 467.

the flag of their country, found no difficulty in relaxing its standard of humanity. Some of the wounded soldiers lying on the field at Assaye heard an English officer in one of Scindia's battalions say to another, "You understand the language better than I do. Tell the jemidar of that body of horse to go and cut up those European soldiers." And this was done. "It is bad enough," is Wellesley's comment, "that these gentlemen should serve the enemies of their country, but it is too bad that they should excite the savage ferocity of the natives against their brave and wounded countrymen. I shall send a list of names of the (British) officers engaged on Scindia's side in this battle, and I will request that the whole may be made public that they may be held up to the execration of their country and the world." [1]

Sometimes, in his despatches, Wellesley describes the native chiefs in terms which for edge and terseness suggest Tacitus:

"The Peishwa should be informed that, from the highest man in State to the lowest, there is not one who will trust him, or who will have any connection or communication with him, except through the mediation and under the guarantee of the British Government. . . . His country is, at this moment, a dreary waste, overrun by thieves. The Peishwa is callous to everything but money and revenge. His Highness is incapable of conducting his government himself. He gives no confidence or power to anybody, and has no person about him able to conduct the common business of the country." [2]

[1] "Indian Despatches," p. 311. [2] Ibid., p. 365.

These despatches, it may be added, reveal all the features of Wellesley's character, exactly as they are discoverable on a later and more conspicuous stage; his saving common-sense, his scorn of opinion, his loyalty to duty, his stubborn truthfulness, his impatience of slackness, his final standard of conduct as "a gentleman." His limitations, too, are there, his sure self-confidence, his hardness, which forbade easy friendships, and which perhaps explains why, as he complained, "no woman ever loved him." He is a soldier, first and last, but it is of the British, not of the French, type. Civil law counts for him even more than the sword:

"I understand military law to be the law of the sword, and in well regulated and disciplined armies to be the will of the general. . . . I long for the return of the civil government. Although a soldier myself, I am not an advocate of placing extensive civil powers in the hands of soldiers."[1]

His hard and masterful common-sense again is visible in such sentences as these:

"It is true that you have a formidable party against you, but when you are to adopt any measure of consequence . . . never take into consideration what that party may think, say, or do upon the occasion. Do not allow yourself to think that they exist, and do your duty as you would if they were where they ought to be, and, I daresay, will be hereafter."[2]

"In all great actions there is risk which the little minds of those who will form their judgment of yourself will readily perceive. . . . But their remarks ought not to give you a moment's uneasiness."[3]

[1] "Indian Despatches," p. 128. [2] Ibid., p. 164. [3] Ibid., p. 225.

He is sensitive to aspersions on his character, and yet, when duty requires it, he can cheerfully run the risk of misconception. Thus he defends a much-criticised act, the levy of a contribution on Berhampoor after its capture, on practical grounds:

"The Governor-General has trusted me to carry on an extensive service here, and I can see that my duty to him requires that I should omit nothing which can ensure its success. It would have been no excuse to him, or to the world, if I had been obliged to give it up for want of money, and yet I must tell you that if it had not been for this money levied at Berhampoor . . . I should not have been able to pay the troops in December. . . . I know that to levy a contribution is common in India and in Europe . . . and that it would have been much more disgraceful and disastrous to have lost the campaign through the want of money than to have ensured in this manner the means of gaining it. I believe I am as anxious as any other man that my character should not suffer—I do not mean in the mouths of common reports and scandal-bearers, but in the eyes of a fair-judging people. I declare that I think I have done what is right; but if the Governor-General thinks it was wrong, it is easy to return the money to the people of Berhampoor. However, if he does this he returns the money into Scindia's pocket, for he will take it immediately."[1]

His recipe for good health in India is amusing. "I know but one receipt for good health in this country, and that is to live moderately, to drink little or no wine, to use exercise, to keep the mind employed, and, if possible, to keep in good humour with the world. The last is the most difficult, as you often observed there is scarcely a good-tempered man in India."

[1] "Indian Despatches," p. 332. [2] Ibid., p. 542.

The standard of honour revealed in the "Despatches" is absolute. Wellesley flames out with a noble anger against every form of corruption. Bribes were common, and there were great precedents on the side of the bribe-takers; but to one subordinate who reported an offered bribe, Wellesley writes:

"In respect of the bribe offered to you and myself, I am surprised that any man in the character of a British officer should not have given the Rajah to understand that the offer should be considered as an insult. . . . Inform him that I and all British officers consider such offers as insults on the part of those by whom they are made."[1]

He resents with a note of passion the action of the Board of Directors in sending back to India corrupt officials who had been dismissed and sent to England. "As for my part," he writes, "I have determined that as soon as I find it is intended to introduce this new system of rapacity into this country I shall withdraw, and I believe that every honest man who is not obliged to stay will do the same. . . . They will infallibly drive out of the country every man who wishes well to the public cause and who prizes his character."[2]

Wellesley had a sufficiently keen sense of the value of his work, but a sort of haughty self-respect made him scorn to ask for office or

[1] "Indian Despatches," p. 545. [2] Ibid., p. 514.

its rewards. "I have received," he wrote, "more rewards for military services than any man who serves, or than any man who ever served this country. But I never solicited one, and if any man had ever interfered between the Government and me to win such reward by solicitation or even suggestion, I should not have considered that man my friend."[1]

Against rascality of every sort he had an iron sternness. He tells the story of some instances of peculation amongst the officers of a certain regiment, and sums up by saying, "I expect shortly to have orders which will let me know whether these gentry are to be brought to a court-martial, or to be dismissed the service, or to be hanged." Plainly, Wellesley would have preferred the latter method.

Acts of oppression on the natives rouse him to a fierce indignation. On the finding of a too lenient court-martial dealing with such a case, he writes: "I never can agree in the opinion that this scandalous conduct is not unbecoming the character of a British officer and a gentleman, and I never can approve a sentence which can describe it in other terms than those of the strongest reprobation. . . . What will be the opinion of British justice, honour, and protection if a gentleman who has been guilty of such acts of oppres-

[1] "Indian Despatches," p. 588.

sion as Mr. —— has himself acknowledged, is suffered to go unpunished?"[1]

Wellesley's stubborn respect for truth is visible in all his Indian career. At one court-martial it was found that the witnesses had been drilled by the accused or his agents. Wellesley writes:

"Truth is the foundation on which the whole superstructure is built. Any method which tends to suppress or pervert truth makes the administration of justice impracticable and brings it to an end."[2]

The analysis of Monson's retreat, written to Malcolm on August 24, 1804, was declared by Sir Robert Peel to be "the best military letter" he had ever read. Sir Robert added—he was hardly a judge—that he considered Wellington "the most powerful writer in the English language." But Sir Charles Napier, himself a great soldier, says that letter decided him never to retire before an Indian army; he owed the victory, he declared, which gave Scinde to England to "the study of the words and deeds of the great Master of war"—Wellesley.

In that historic letter Wellesley traces the disaster, in the main, to two causes—Monson's failure of forethought as to his supplies, and failure to attack his enemy, instead of waiting to be attacked by him. "Even in retreat," he writes, "it must be recollected that it is safe and easy in proportion to the number of attacks made by the

[1] "Indian Despatches," p. 627. [2] Ibid., p. 629.

retreating corps." "Attention to the foregoing observations," he adds, "will, I hope, prevent a British corps from retreating."

In his general advice as to the conduct of the war with Holkar he insists, over and over again, on the necessity of wisely organised and adequate supplies. Then he enforces a daring policy. The enemy must never be allowed to attack a camp of the British force.

"Move out to attack them. Do not allow them to attack your camp on any account. If the enemy tries to cut off your communications, beat up his cavalry camp as frequently as you may hear of their situation. Do not allow the enemy to lie near you with impunity, and you will soon clear the communication. . . . If your provisions should fail you, and you should hear that Holkar's infantry is near you, you ought to attack them before you think of anything else." [1]

Wellesley is no sentimentalist. When discussing the treaty with Scindia, he says:

"As for the wishes of the people, particularly in this country, I put them out of the question. They are the only philosophers about their governors that ever I met with, if indifference constitutes that character." [2]

Wellesley himself — as these despatches make clear — had an almost amusing certainty of self-confidence. "Would to God," he writes, after the story of Monson's retreat, "that I had come round here in March, and Holkar would now have been in the tomb of all the Capulets." [3]

[1] "Indian Despatches," p. 433. [2] Ibid., p. 463. [3] Ibid., p. 426.

The whole picture offered by the Indian despatches is that of a strong, masterful, and hard character, impatient of waste and slovenliness, stern in its scorn for every kind of baseness, severe in its standard both for itself and others. Not, perhaps, a lovable character, or one easy for other men to work with; but certainly noble and high. In India, as surely as in the Peninsula, or as before and after Waterloo, he was a tower of strength, which stood "four-square to all the winds that blew."

CHAPTER XI

LEAVING INDIA

"You are entitled to our gratitude for the tranquillity, security, and prosperity which we have enjoyed under your beneficent administration. We address our prayers to the God of all castes and of all nations, that He will grant you health, glory, and good fortune."—*Address of the inhabitants of Seringapatam to* WELLESLEY.

WELLESLEY sailed from India, on his return to England, in March, 1805. His ship touched at St. Helena, and he spent some little time there, an incident which, although Wellesley himself was unconscious of it, perhaps helped to determine, ten years later, the selection of that lonely rock in the vast wastes of the Atlantic as the prison in which Napoleon was to spend his last days. The careers of those two great rivals in war touch at odd points. In their earlier stages at least they are in sharpest contrast with each other. Napoleon was the master of Egypt when his unguessed rival was only a lieutenant-colonel, commanding the reserves in the trenches before Seringapatam. He was winning Marengo, and shaking the thrones of half the kings of the world, when the soldier who was to finally over-

throw him was hunting down a Mahratta freebooter in the jungles of Mysore. He was First Consul for life, and had the glory of a dozen victories about his head, before Wellesley had won Assaye. He had been crowned Emperor at Notre Dame by a Pope when Wellesley, a discontented man, was about to sail from India; and he had received a new crown—that of Italy—at Milan while Wellesley was rambling amongst the windy cliffs at St. Helena.

What an interval parts the two figures—a "Sepoy general," whose genius was unguessed even by his own countrymen in England; and Napoleon, round whom all the splendours of history seem to gather! What has most impressed the imagination of the world is the breathless haste of Napoleon's rise to greatness. Only thirteen years separate Toulon, where Bonaparte, an unknown artillery officer, was in command of a battery, and Austerlitz, where he overthrew two emperors. But, somehow, the fact that Napoleon's career was nearly as short as it was swift is forgotten. Less than ten years lie betwixt Austerlitz and Waterloo. The famous conference with the Czar at Tilsit in June, 1807, where kingdoms and provinces were shuffled at his bidding like so many cards, was the climax of Napoleon's career. And eight brief years part the raft at Tilsit from the rock in the Atlantic.

Wellington's rise into fame, on the other hand,

if it was slower than that of his great rival, knew no reflux. And it is surely one of the ironies of history that—almost at the moment when Napoleon, already Emperor of France, was being crowned King of Italy at Milan—an English lieutenant-general, whose name was practically unknown in Europe, but who only ten years later was to shatter Napoleon's plans at Waterloo, was surveying a splinter of rock in the Atlantic, and, unconsciously even to himself, choosing it as his great rival's prison and grave.

It is interesting to reflect that at one moment there was a possibility that Napoleon and Wellesley might meet and measure their genius against each other in India. Just when Wellesley was preparing to leave India the hills above Boulogne were white with the tents of the army assembled for the invasion of England. But Thiers says that for four weeks Napoleon hesitated betwixt casting that force on the shores of England or despatching it against India. "The overthrow of the British Empire in the peninsula of the Ganges," says Thiers, "presented to him such important results that he was tempted to risk his person and his army in an effort to the full as hazardous as the descent on the coast of England itself." In the end Napoleon chose neither England nor India as the objective of the magnificent host he had gathered on the shores of the Channel. When Wellesley reached

England that great army was on its stormy way to Austerlitz—with Jena and Friedland beyond.

But that India always had a strange fascination for Napoleon is certain. After his treaty with Persia, he sent a commission of officers to examine Persian harbours, with a view to the invasion of India. A report was drawn up recommending the Mediterranean route, with Cyprus as a base of supplies, and giving the distances for the march overland from Syria to the Ganges. "It is clear," says Rose, in his "Life of Napoleon,"[1] "that even when that restless genius was face to face with the mighty forces on the Vistula his thoughts still turned longingly to the banks of the Ganges."

If Napoleon had embarked the army at Boulogne, and sailed with it for India, no doubt strange and startling events would have followed. Waterloo, for one thing, might have been fought ten years earlier, say on the Nurbuddah—and with another issue. For Napoleon, at the head of 50,000 French veterans, with Murat to command his cavalry, Ney to lead his columns of attack, and Berthier or Lannes as his chief of staff, might well have changed the whole course, not only of Indian history, but of the world's history. On the other hand, if Napoleon had turned the stems of his transports towards India, it is probable that Trafalgar would have been fought at a little earlier date, and in

[1] Vol. ii. p. 1

quite new latitudes. Nelson was accustomed to express his longing to "have Napoleon under his lee in a gale"; and certainly the Grand Army, say, in a heavy sea off the Cape, all deplorably sea-sick, and with Nelson and Collingwood to windward, would have supplied the conditions of a sea-tragedy on the biggest scale.

Wellesley reaped a not too generous harvest of rewards for his work in India. He had risen, it is true, to the rank of lieutenant-general, he was made an extra Knight of the Bath, he had received the special thanks of both Houses of Parliament, and yet he was discontented. The scale of the work he had done in India was unrecognised in England; his great gifts as a commander were doubted; he was not a favourite in official military circles. "The Horse Guards," as he himself said afterwards, "never showed me any favour, and thought little of an Indian victory; it was rather a ground of suspicion than confidence. Because I was an M.P. they thought I must be a politician, not a soldier; they looked on me as a sprig of nobility come into the army for honours, but of no use; they could not believe I was a tolerable artillery officer. . . . I have proved that they thought I could not be trusted alone with a division."

Wellesley may have been right when he said that the Horse Guards showed him no favour; it

was certain, however, that the statesmen responsible for the conduct of affairs in England quickly recognised his great gifts. Almost immediately on his arrival from India he was consulted as an expert about the details of an expedition to Hanover. It is to this period that Pitt's oft-quoted judgment on Wellesley belongs. "I never met a military officer," he said, "with whom it is so satisfactory to converse. He states every difficulty before he undertakes any service, but never after he has undertaken it." This combination of the vision which saw every difficulty, with the courage that dared, and the genius that solved, all difficulties, made Wellesley an adviser of priceless value to the men who at that moment were carrying the heavy and perilous burden of the fortunes of Great Britain. When, a little later, Malcolm was urging him to return to India, say, as Governor and Commander-in-Chief at Madras, Wellesley wrote in reply: "Men in power in England think very little of India, and those who do think of it have very little inclination that I should go there. . . . I am employed in this country in much the same way as I was in India; that is to say, in everything."

On April 10, 1806, Wellesley found time to marry his early love, Catherine Pakenham, third daughter of the Earl of Longford. There may have been an element of chivalry in the marriage, but on

Wellesley's side, at least, there cannot have been any very ardent affection. And even the chivalry was less than is generally supposed. The accepted tradition is that Kitty Pakenham had lost all her beauty during an attack of small-pox, and as a consequence released, or offered to release, Wellesley from the vague, unwritten engagement betwixt them. Wellesley, however, so the story runs, accepted a pock-pitted bride rather than break a bond of honour, no matter how slender.

The story is romantic, but the facts hardly agree with it. Wellesley had never written to Kitty Pakenham from India, and those seven or eight years of silence might well have seemed the end of all ties. But on his return to England some gossip told him that Kitty Pakenham was still unmarried. "What!" said Wellesley, "does she still remember me? Do you think I ought to renew my offer? I am ready to do it." He wrote with business-like, if not lover-like, promptitude, and was told by his intended bride, with a touch of half pathetic coyness, that it was so long since they had met he had better come and see her before committing himself; he might find her aged and changed. But Kitty Pakenham had suffered no loss of beauty. Her pretty face and dainty complexion survived small-pox. They were married; she bore Wellesley two sons, and was faithful to him as a wife; but though Wellesley's

qualities were high in other fields, he had few of the domestic virtues. He was too much preoccupied with his career as a soldier—if not too hard by nature—to make a tender husband. Nor were the social habits of his day, or even the traditions of his own family, of the sort which generate a high and scrupulous standard of wedded honour. In later years, as we have seen, Wellesley complained, "No woman ever loved me"; but most men get at least as much love from their womankind as they deserve; and this is true of the husband of Kitty Pakenham.

On April 12, two days after his marriage, Wellesley was elected member of Parliament for Rye. His immediate task in the House was the defence of his brother's Indian administration. Lord Mornington was charged with "acts of tyranny, fraud, and hypocrisy against Tippoo"; of extravagance in finance, of having increased with reckless expenditure the Indian debt, &c. Wellesley, with his sure grasp of facts, his straightforward simplicity of speech, his energetic common-sense, had no difficulty in refuting charges so wild brought against an administration so splendid. During the few years of office, Lord Mornington, to quote Alison, "added provinces to the British Empire larger than France, extended its influence over territories more extensive than the whole of Germany, and vanquished in succession four fierce and warlike

nations who could bring 300,000 men into the field." This was certainly a record that needed no apology.

Wellesley, meanwhile, was busy with his work as a soldier, accepting with characteristic loyalty every task laid upon him. He became colonel of the 33rd after being for ten years its lieutenant-colonel. He was appointed to the command of a brigade at Hastings, and brought its discipline and equipment to a high standard. One of the incidents of this period is the solitary interview he had with Nelson. The story of how the greatest soldier and the most famous seaman of the British race met in a little waiting-room at the Colonial Office, was told by Wellesley himself in a talk with Croker,[1] and is well known. Wellesley recognised Nelson from the pictures of him he had seen, and by the looped sleeve of his uniform, which showed the loss of an arm. Nelson, in his impetuous fashion, plunged into conversation with Wellesley at once, without knowing who he was, and "talked," says Wellesley, "all about himself, and in a style so vain and so silly as to surprise and almost disgust me." Presently something Wellesley said caught Nelson's quick intelligence, and showed him that his interlocutor was an uncommon man. He went out of the room for a moment—"I have no doubt," says Wellesley, "to ask the office-keeper

[1] "Correspondence and Diaries," vol. ii. p. 333.

who I was—and when he returned he was a different man, both in style and speech. All that I had thought charlatan style had vanished . . . in fact, he talked like an officer and statesman; for the last half or three-quarters of an hour I do not know that I ever had a conversation that interested me more." Would that some adequate Boswell had been in that little room, and recorded the talk between two such masters in the art of battle!

There were, no doubt, two sides to Nelson's character, and in that interview Wellesley saw them both. His own nature had not the emotional range of Nelson's—the touch of irritable genius, the strain of passion, the capacity for tenderness, as well as for fire. Had Wellesley taken the sea as his field, he could have framed the daring tactics of Trafalgar, and have led down on to Villeneuve's line in the *Victory* as splendidly as Nelson himself. But he probably would not have made that dash on the Spanish three-deckers by which Nelson broke his admiral's line at St. Vincent; and he certainly would never have said, "Kiss me," to any epauletted Hardy when he was dying. No wonder that what he calls "the charlatan style" in Nelson at first disgusted Wellesley's severe, and more reticent, temper.

At the moment these two famous men were assessing each other in that dingy little room in

the Colonial Office, Trafalgar, it is curious to reflect, was only a few weeks distant. How little either of the two could have foreseen that a century later a great poet would picture that little one-armed seaman—as, with the tramp of great multitudes, the dead body of the other was carried to be laid beside him in the crypt of St. Paul's—calling from his grave:

"Who is he that cometh, like an honour'd guest,
With banner and with music, with soldier and with priest,
With a nation weeping, and breaking on my rest?"

CHAPTER XII

COPENHAGEN

"No doubt it was a violation of the law of property. The law which protects property is to be respected, but the law which protects life supersedes it."—HAMLEY.

PITT died on January 3, 1806, and the "Ministry of all the talents" came into power. In 1807 the Catholic difficulty had broken afresh into politics, and in an odd shape. Roman Catholics and Dissenters were forbidden by Act of Parliament to hold commissions in the army and navy, and Ministers brought in a Bill to do away with this injustice, and make legal the grant of commissions to any of the King's subjects. But George III., with the narrow vision and unyielding obstinacy so characteristic of him, refused his consent to the measure. Ministers resigned, a new Cabinet was formed by the Duke of Portland, with Castlereagh at the War Office and Canning at the Foreign Office, and Wellesley accepted the post of Chief Secretary for Ireland. He was, as a matter of fact, in sympathy with the very policy which had driven the "Ministry of all the

talents" from office; but he was in politics intensely practical. He knew that, as a matter of fact, Roman Catholics and Dissenters alike served freely, both in the army and the navy; so he looked on the objectionable law as a dead letter, and held any new legislation to be unnecessary.

Wellesley held office as Chief Secretary for Ireland for two years, and did the work—much of it very dirty work—of that post with the methodical diligence—a diligence that knew no scruples and asked no questions—of a good soldier obeying orders. Seats in Parliament had to be bought, members had to be bribed; and Wellesley bought the seats and bribed the members with entire composure. The King's Government had to be carried on, and this was the accepted way of doing it. He was a man of action, not a philosopher. Long before, he had told Malcolm, "You see what is good and desirable, I see what is practicable"; and upon this principle he carried on his Irish duties.

But he always knew that his true career was that of a soldier, and stipulated that his political work should not stand in the way of any call to active service. The office of Chief Secretary for Ireland carried with it a salary of £8000 a year; but "no political office," Wellesley wrote, "could compensate me for the loss of the situation which I hold in the army, and nothing shall induce me

to give it up." And in July, 1807, there came a sudden call to active service.

The Treaty of Tilsit marks the climax of Napoleon's career. He had overthrown in turn the armies of all the great Continental States; the Czar had fallen under his spell, and was pliant to his will, and it seemed as if his plan of subduing the land by the sea—of shutting all European ports, that is, against Great Britain—would succeed. The Treaty of Tilsit, if it had been carried out, would, as a matter of fact, have thrust Great Britain out of the comity of civilised nations. Every port in the world would have been sealed against British ships. And, menacing as was the famous Treaty in its published form, there were known to be secret articles which disquieted British statesmen still more profoundly. These are no longer "secret," and they justify to the full the dread which the mere whisper of their existence created at the time. Napoleon and the Czar bound themselves to make common cause in any war against any European Power that either might undertake. The Czar was to approach England, and require her to surrender all the French colonies, with all the other conquests she might have made, since 1805, and recognise the equality of all flags at sea. If England refused, France and Russia were to declare war upon her, and summon Sweden, Denmark, and Portugal to

close their ports against English goods, and join the league against Great Britain. If any one of these three countries refused, it was to be crushed.

Now, Denmark was a naval Power, with a formidable array of ships, and British statesmen found no difficulty in guessing that Napoleon intended to seize the Danish fleet, and use it as a weapon against Great Britain. And, if the fleets of Sweden, Portugal, and Denmark were added to those already under the French flag, England might well lose the command of the sea. Her own shores would lie open to invasion.

Napoleon had adroitly arranged that Russia should postpone, till the end of the year, the final summons to the British Government. This, he wrote, on July 6, 1807, "will give five months in which the first exasperation will die down in England, and she will have time to understand the immense consequences that would result from so imprudent a struggle." "The conqueror," says Rose, "who had thrice crumpled up the Hapsburg States, and shattered Prussia in a day, might well believe that the men of Downing Street, expert only in missing opportunities and exasperating their friends, would not dare to defy the forces of united Europe."[1]

But "the men of Downing Street" had the stubborn courage of their race; they knew they were engaged in a struggle on which hung their

[1] "Life of Napoleon," vol. ii. p. 138

national existence; and they showed in this crisis that they could plan as daringly, and strike as swiftly, as Napoleon himself.

On July 15, Castlereagh learned by a letter from Sir Robert Wilson, then at the Russian Court, what were the secret clauses in the Treaty of Tilsit. Four days later the British Cabinet had formed their plans for anticipating Napoleon. The Danish fleet, it was certain, would be used as a weapon against them; they must grasp it first. Within little more than a fortnight from Castlereagh's receipt of Wilson's letter an expedition, consisting of twenty-seven ships of the line, with transports carrying an army of 20,000 men, was on its way to Copenhagen. Lord Cathcart was in command, with Sir David Baird, Sir Harry Burrard, and Wellesley as generals of divisions. Great Britain offered Denmark an alliance; the Danish fleet was to be handed over, and kept as "a sacred pledge" till peace arrived, Denmark, meanwhile, receiving a subsidy of £100,000 a year, and a pledge of armed assistance in case she should be attacked by France. These terms were refused. The British fleet was off Copenhagen on August 4; on the 16th the troops landed, and the offer of alliance was renewed, with the warning that, if rejected, the Danish ships would be seized as mere prizes.

Copenhagen was ill-prepared for resistance, and probably might have been seized at once, and almost

without a shot. Lord Cathcart, however, undertook a formal siege. He planted his batteries, and, against Wellesley's strong advice, bombarded the city. Wellesley's contribution to the campaign consisted in the business of routing a Danish force, chiefly militia, numbering 14,000, at Roskilde.

On September 5 the city capitulated, Wellesley drawing up the terms; and by October 20 the squadron was back in England, bringing with it fifteen Danish line of battleships, nine frigates, fourteen sloops, and a vast quantity of naval stores.

There may be doubts, still, as to the justice of British policy in this matter; though it was justified at the time, and is still justified, by the law of self-preservation. All that England did was to snatch up a weapon which Napoleon was on the point of seizing and using against her. But whatever views may be held as to the moral quality of the transaction, there is no doubt as to its daring, nor as to the swiftness and completeness with which it was carried out. These "men of Downing Street," as Hooper says, "conducted that stupendous conflict by land and sea in which they were engaged with Roman tenacity, and to a Roman conclusion." In the Copenhagen business, it may be added, they acted with a swiftness and energy not often found even in Roman annals.

Wellesley had joined the expedition to Copenhagen pledged to return within three months, and resume

his post as Chief Secretary for Ireland. On his return at the end of September he found that an expedition to South America was on foot, and he was at once consulted by the Cabinet in regard to it. Great Britain was at war with Spain, and it was part of her familiar policy—the natural reward of her command of the sea—to snap up one by one the colonies of her enemies. A revolution had broken out in the Spanish colonies, and General Miranda, a representative of the revolutionary party, was in London urging the assistance of Britain. The conquest of Spanish America was a very tempting bait; it would avenge, for one thing, the disgrace of Whitelock's failure at Buenos Ayres. Wellesley was instructed to draw up a scheme for the expedition, but his sober intellect suspected all revolutions. As he himself said long afterwards, "I always had a horror of revolutionising any country for a political object. If revolutions in any country broke out of themselves, well and good, but," said Wellesley, "do not stir them up; it is a fearful responsibility."[1]

With characteristic loyalty to the instructions of his superiors, however, Wellesley prepared elaborate minutes—no less than fourteen are still preserved—on the proposed expedition, covering every detail, from the geography of the country about to be invaded to the number of flints required for the muskets of the infantry. Amongst all his

[1] Stanhope, p. 69.

papers there are, perhaps, none that more perfectly reflect his characteristic genius for detail, as well as the power of forecasting imagination he possessed. He seemed to have the faculty of seeing in advance every detail of the landscape, and every characteristic of the people, their temper and habits, likely to come within the sphere of operations.

A fleet of transports had assembled at Cork for the expedition. The force consisted of 9000 men, and Wellesley was to be in command. Had that expedition sailed Wellesley might, no doubt, have made his mark in South America as ineffaceably as he did in India, and to-day there might be a South American Canada under the British flag, and no Monroe Doctrine. But a sudden and dramatic turn in events arrested the expedition, and gave it a new destination. Napoleon was carrying out his designs for turning Spain into a French province, with a Bonaparte on its throne as king; and that circumstance transformed Spain from an enemy into an ally. The very troops that were about to sail for the purpose of depriving Spain of her American colonies were the first to begin those six memorable campaigns waged in the Peninsula to save Spain itself from destruction.

BOOK III

THE PENINSULA

CHAPTER I

A NEW FIELD OF WAR

"I embarked very badly on the Spanish affair, I confess. The immorality of it was too patent, the injustice too cynical, and the whole thing wears an ugly look now I have fallen."—NAPOLEON *at St. Helena.*

WHEN set in the perspective of history, and illuminated by all the "secret" records and correspondence since published, Napoleon's dealings with Spain, alike in their object and their methods, become perfectly clear. His motive in the whole business corresponded exactly to that of a footpad who finds on a lonely road some elderly and half-imbecile citizen believed to have jewels in his pocket. It is possible, of course, to translate Napoleon's Spanish plans into political terms, and so make them almost respectable; but the moral quality of the whole transaction, no matter how politely described, remains the same. Napoleon wished to add another Kinglet to the circle of dependent royalties about France which he was creating. One Napoleon already reigned at Naples, another in Holland, a third in Westphalia; why should not a fourth be set up at Madrid? A

Bourbon sat on the Spanish throne, and Napoleon had what might be described as a Corsican feud with all the Bourbons.

Spain, it must be remembered, had been for eight years the docile ally of France. Her choicest troops were sent to take part in French campaigns under other skies; Spanish ships were in the line of battle at Trafalgar; a subsidy of 4,000,000 francs a month was drawn from the Spanish treasury to fill French pockets. But an ally, no matter how humble, might, at some critical juncture of affairs, develop an inconvenient desire for independence. If the flame of an insurrection broke out in the Pyrenees, or if 100,000 Spaniards came through the passes and invaded Southern France while Napoleon was fighting, say, on the Vistula, the result might be tragical.

So Napoleon determined to make Spain a French dependency, and the methods he adopted were, in point of morality, on a level with the motives which inspired them. Spain was invited to join France in a felonious attack on Portugal. The treaty of Fontainebleau was simply a conspiracy betwixt France and Spain for the destruction of that unhappy kingdom. The Portuguese Government was required to close its ports against British commerce and to put its fleet under the control of France. The demand was framed so as to make a refusal certain, and a refusal, or even a request for some

variation in the detail of things demanded, was to be the signal for invasion. A French corps under Junot was assembled at Bayonne. It was to cross the Pyrenees, be joined by various Spanish detachments, and march on Lisbon. Portugal was to be dismembered. One-third of its territory was assigned to Spain, another third was to form a principality for Godoy, the Spanish Prime Minister.

But when Napoleon invited Spain to join in the plunder of an unoffending neighbour he himself proposed to use the crime as a trap for the destruction of his confederate. "This Prince of the Peace" (Godoy), he said, "is loathed by the Nation. He is the rascal who will himself open for me the gates of Spain."

Junot began his march on Lisbon, and divisions of Spanish troops joined him, but the French, not the Spanish, flag was hoisted on each Portuguese town in turn. Meanwhile still other columns of French troops, one following fast after another, crossed the Pyrenees and moved, not on Lisbon, but on Madrid. All the frontier fortresses of Spain —Barcelona, Pampeluna, San Sebastian, where the Pyrenees touch the Atlantic; Figueras, which guards the pass along the Mediterranean — were seized by clever tricks. Before Junot reached Lisbon the French flag was flying on these strong places, and 60,000 French troops were on the road to Madrid.

Napoleon, in a word, tempted Spain to join him in robbing Portugal, and used the joint adventure as an occasion for plundering Spain of its independence. In view of the complete story to say that the ethics of Napoleon resembled those of a footpad is, on the whole, unjust to the footpad. Napoleon himself, at St. Helena, looking back upon the whole story, frankly recognised its wickedness. "I embarked very badly on the Spanish affair, I confess," he said. "The immorality of it was too patent, the injustice too cynical, and the whole thing wears an ugly look now since I have fallen."[1] If "the Spanish affair" had succeeded, both Napoleon and history, it may be suspected, would have taken another view of it. Certainly for Napoleon, and perhaps for a good many historians, failure is the last and worst of crimes.

What seemed at the moment almost to justify the plot against Spain was the character of its government. It would not have been easy to find under any roof in Europe a more despicable group than that in the royal palace at Madrid—the semi-imbecile king, with his receding forehead and his slobbering mouth, the complaisant husband of a wife with the morals of a harlot; her lover, Godoy, practically the ruler of Spain; the son Ferdinand, false, ignorant, superstitious. The air of Spain would have been a little sweeter had the whole

[1] Rose, "Life of Napoleon," vol. ii. p. 167.

group been dismissed into space. But a nation like the Spanish, sensitive and proud, if superstitious, a nation of 11,000,000, with a great history behind it and at least some great qualities in it, cannot lightly be used as a counter in a game betwixt rogues and fools.

Murat was at Madrid with 20,000 good French soldiers, and it seemed probable that, by playing off one shameful figure in the royal Spanish household against another, all alike would be effaced, when a sudden burst of popular feeling disturbed the clever game of mingled force and fraud which the French were playing. The Spanish court was at Aranjuez. The whisper ran that Godoy was about to carry off the King and Queen and put them into the hands of the French. The mob rose, stormed the mansion of the favourite, and gathered round the palace clamouring for his head. The terrified king agreed to strip Godoy of all his offices, and later was persuaded, in a new paroxysm of terror, to sign a short document of twelve lines abdicating the throne in favour of his son.

But the prospect of a new king on the Spanish throne, young, and—if only because he was unknown—not unpopular, disturbed Napoleon's plans. On the morning after receiving the news of the abdication of Charles IV., he wrote offering the crown of Spain to his brother Louis, in Holland, and, on his refusal, offered it to his elder brother,

Joseph, at Naples. Meanwhile he refused to recognise Ferdinand as king, and Charles was persuaded to withdraw his abdication on the ground that it had been extorted from him by force.

With much ingenuity all the parties in the sordid drama were beguiled into Napoleon's presence at Bayonne. Charles was easily induced to sign a document assigning all his rights to the throne of Spain and to the Indies to Napoleon, "the only person in the present state of affairs who could re-establish order." One pious condition was annexed. The Roman Catholic religion was to be the only one recognised on Spanish soil. There was, "according to the existing practice, to be no toleration for any of the reformed religions, much less for infidels." With this document in his pocket Napoleon, assisted by the amazing father of Ferdinand, terrified that unfortunate prince, in turn, into a resignation of his claim to the Spanish throne. The dispossessed Spanish royalties were despatched to France, with a guarantee of sufficient pensions—to come out of Spanish pockets; for Spain was to pay the price of her own betrayal; and on May 24 there was published in the *Madrid Gazette* a list, drawn up by Napoleon himself, of 150 Spanish notabilities—dukes and counts, ministers and judges, bishops and priors—who were to assemble at Bayonne and petition him to set Joseph Bonaparte on the throne of Spain.

It was a clever game. It was played with ruthless determination, and had reached what seemed to be a triumphant climax. The only factor Napoleon had left out of his calculations was—the Spanish people. On May 2 carriages were starting from the palace gates in Madrid, carrying Francewards the various members of the royal household still in that city. In one carriage, Don Francisco, the youngest prince of the royal house, a mere lad, was placed under the charge of a French aide-de-camp. At the sight the watching mob broke loose, the coach was torn to pieces, the French aide-de-camp was beaten well-nigh to death with stones, and Madrid, almost at a single breath, was in revolt. Scattered parties of French in every street were killed, there was stubborn fighting at a dozen points.

But Murat had an army at his command; the mob was suppressed with cruel slaughter, and for a moment everything seemed quiet. "The affairs of Spain," Murat wrote to Napoleon, "are going off wonderfully well."

The news of the outbreak of May 2, however, and of the slaughter which crushed it, crept slowly through Spain, and then, one by one, the provinces broke into revolt. Asturias was in flame by May 19, Galicia followed, then Aragon, Catalonia—province after province—till two-thirds of Spain had risen against the French. It was, it is true, a rising, so to speak, in unrelated patches. The

Spain of that day can hardly be described as having any general national consciousness. Politically the nation resembled nothing so much as one of those forms of animal life which have no common nervous system. Each province was a separate nerve-centre. But if this was, from one point of view, the weakness of the rising, in another it was its strength. The revolt had no single head which could be reached and shattered with a blow. Madrid was not Spain, in the sense that Paris is France. The suppression of the rising in one province left unaffected, and even undiscouraged, the revolt of other provinces.

The geography of Spain, it may be added, gave curious efficiency to those isolated risings. The Spain of that period might almost be described, for military purposes, at least, as a roadless land. Rivers that could not be navigated were crossed by roads impassable to guns. The whole country was serrated by mountain ranges, in whose wild passes the march of a small army could be arrested, and on whose naked and wind-blown summits a big army would starve. Napoleon's vision for the landscape, his genius for assessing all the factors of a great problem, failed him utterly in Spain. He called the Spanish rising "an insurrection of monks." He believed that the local revolts could be put down by columns which, in strength, were little better than itinerant police. His principle of

making war support itself—which worked sufficiently well on the fat plains of Germany, or amongst the vines of Italy—was expected to work equally well on the bleak and empty tablelands of Spain.

"It was the Spanish ulcer," Napoleon said bitterly in later years, "which destroyed me." But at first he believed the ulcer to be a mere harmless and accidental skin-irritation. He knew better later, when Dupont, with 20,000 troops, surrendered at Baylen, when Moncey failed at Valencia, and when Verdier had to abandon the siege of Saragossa. Spanish armies, it is true, won few victories, and Spanish generals were guilty of every fault possible in war. But when Saragossa, a city almost without fortifications, was held for two months by citizens and peasants, against a French army 15,000 strong, equipped with siege artillery, then it became clear that the Spaniards could fight, and that the Spanish revolt had in it forces which might well tax even the genius of Napoleon to overcome.

Now the Spanish rising offered to England a great opportunity, and two men at least—the two keenest minds at that moment in Great Britain—were able to see it. Pitt saw it with the vision of a statesman; Wellesley with the eyes of a soldier. It was during a dinner, towards the end of 1805, that, according to a well-known story, Pitt received the news of the surrender of Mack at Ulm, with

the added intelligence that Napoleon was marching on Vienna. Some one at the table exclaimed that "all was lost." "No," said Pitt, and he went on to declare his faith that a national war would destroy Napoleon, a war which would probably begin in Spain. It was to the attack of Napoleon on Spain that Pitt looked for the war which was to save Europe.

And Pitt's reading of the situation was profoundly true. Hitherto Napoleon had been fighting with the Courts and armies of Europe; he had never had to meet the rising of a people. The French Revolution represented, or believed itself to represent, the cause of the people as against the kings; and Napoleon was, in a sense, its political heir. But in Spain he was visibly using the armies of France *against* the people; and using them not to pull down a throne, but to set one up. He was fighting, in a word, against all that the Revolution meant. "Spain," says Napier, "was invaded because she formed a portion of the great aristocracy of Europe, and she was delivered because England supplied that aristocracy with the means of winning a triumph over the results of the French Revolution." But that sentence is only one of the numerous instances in which Napier, in his immortal history, allows his politics to obscure his vision of facts. It was the appeal of Spain to the people of England—not merely to its aristocracy which proved irresistible.

Wellesley, on his part, looked at the situation with the eyes of a great captain. Moore, the only soldier of that period who approaches Wellington in genius, told Castlereagh that Portugal was not defensible against a superior force. "If the French succeed in Spain," he wrote, "it will be vain to attempt to resist them in Portugal. . . . The defence of Lisbon or of Portugal should not be thought of." That memorandum was written on November 25, 1808; on March 7, not four months later, Wellesley wrote a history-making memorandum to Castlereagh in which he gave an exactly opposite opinion. Portugal, he said, could be defended, whatever might be the result of the contest in Spain. Here was a strip of territory, 100 miles wide, with a sea front of 300 miles; and, for a British force, the sea was a secure base. As Wellesley read the situation there were in it at least three certainties, all of the first importance. It was certain that the French could not hold Spain securely, with a British army on their flank in Portugal; it was equally certain that they could not strike effectively at the British in Portugal across an unsubdued Spain; it was certain, again, that while the British held a threatening position on their flank, and Spain was unsubdued, French armies must be employed in the Peninsula on a scale which would fatally cripple Napoleon himself in central Europe.

It must be remembered that Napoleon had im-

posed on himself practically the task of garrisoning all Europe. A force of 300,000 men was encamped between the Oder and the Vistula to overawe Germany and to keep Russia steady. Another army of 200,000 men was required in Italy as a guard against Austria. The Spanish rising kindled a war, wasting, ignoble, and inextinguishable, which taxed the strength of an army varying from 200,000 to 400,000 men under some of Napoleon's best marshals. It was a war, too, which, under the stroke of a British army from Portugal, was always liable to some sudden catastrophe deadly to Napoleon's prestige.

It was this which made Spain the "ulcer" which destroyed Napoleon; and Pitt, from the statesman's point of view, and Wellesley, from that of the soldier, saw this long before Napoleon himself guessed it. But, considered as a question of strategy, it was Wellesley who first put his finger on the flaw in Napoleon's plans. Fortune has its caprices and its cruelties, but it also has its equities; and it was in every way fitting that the British soldier who, in 1809, saw the vulnerable spot in Napoleon's strategy, should six years afterwards, at Waterloo, strike the final blow which brought Napoleon's career to an end. For it may be safely said if there had been no Peninsular War there would have been no Waterloo.

The British Cabinet proposed, at first, merely to

nourish the Spanish rising by a plentiful diet of muskets and cash. The Spanish juntas themselves believed this would be sufficient; with an heroic faith in the efficiency of their own armies, they declared there were Spaniards enough to drive the French over the Pyrenees; they needed nothing but weapons and money. It was Wellesley's practical genius, his gift for seeing, and his relentless sanity in facing, the hard facts of the case which convinced the Cabinet, at last, that assistance to Spain, to be effective, must take the shape of an armed force.

It was accordingly determined to despatch on this business the troops at that moment in the transports lying at Cork, intended to sail for America; and it was inevitable that Wellesley himself should be in command. Ministers stipulated, however, that he should not give up his post as Chief Secretary for Ireland; and it is probable that the military authorities, at least, jealous of a commander so youthful, and unconvinced by his Indian fame, hoped that he would refuse the command offered him with this condition. But no political office could have held Wellesley back from the command of an army proceeding on active service. In twenty-four hours the whole business in London was settled, and Wellesley hurried off to Cork.

His force consisted of 9505 rank and file, with twelve guns. But the guns were without horses, the cavalry counted only 346 sabres; there was no

commissariat and no transport; hospital arrangements had been forgotten; the staff was wholly inexperienced. All this serves to show that the British military authorities, after having been at war almost continuously for twelve years, had not even yet mastered the alphabet of effective warfare. That guns needed horses to draw them; that an army could not exist without a commissariat, nor a commissariat without means of transport; that to send troops into battle without making provision for their wounded is cruelty—all this seems quite obvious even to an untrained intelligence. But in the days, to quote Professor Oman, "when Frederick, Duke of York, with the occasional assistance of Mrs. Mary Ann Clarke, managed the affairs of the British army," even these rudimentary rules of warfare were forgotten, or ignored. Wellesley's force would have been absolutely without transport, and his guns so many lumps of harmless iron, but that he extorted permission from London, at the last moment, to add two troops of the "Royal Irish Corps of Waggoners" to his force. "It certainly was," said Wellesley himself in after years, "a shabby enough start, but it was quite of a piece with our military policy of the time. The Government trusted me, I believe, as much as it trusted anybody, but it had no great faith in me as yet, and dreaded nothing so much as throwing a large army ashore on the Continent."

That mistrust of British generalship, on the part of the British War Office, had many unpleasant facts to justify it. In Egypt, it is true, under Abercrombie, and in Sicily, under Stuart, some gleams of genius for war had been visible amongst British commanders; but with these exceptions, the whole period of the war, whilst it had been rich in fame for British fleets, has yielded no laurels to British armies. The British private, indeed, kept the ancient fighting power of his race. Even of his ill-equipped force at Cork Wellesley says, "I must admit that the men were admirable, and admirably drilled; all that they wanted was experience." But "experience"—or, rather, the wisdom born of experience—was exactly the quality of which the military authorities themselves were tragically destitute. The reader who, to-day, studies, with amazed eyes, the contradictory and impossible instructions given to Wellesley when he sailed for Spain, hardly knows whether to sigh or to smile.

But the chief proof of folly on the part of the British War Office is supplied by the fact that three days after Wellesley's transports had weighed anchor, and before he had reached Spain, he was displaced in his command. Burrard was despatched to supersede him, and Dalrymple to supersede Burrard. It seemed as if the astonishing War Office believed that abundance and variety in the supply of generals would make up for the want

of more prosaic equipment. It has to be admitted, of course, that when the scale of the expedition was changed, and from a detachment of 9000 men it was to grow to an army of 30,000, then official etiquette—if that alone is to count—required that a senior officer should be placed in command.

The increase in the scale of the expedition was the result of a policy of concentration which had common-sense to recommend it. Half-a-dozen tiny British armies were scattered over sea and land, engaged on as many distracted adventures with no coherent and intelligent strategy behind them. These were now to be concentrated. Moore was to bring his force of 10,000 men from Sweden to Spain. Spencer's division, which had been swinging for months, a mere grumbling human pendulum, betwixt Lisbon and Cadiz or Ceuta, was directed to join Wellesley. Reinforcements under Anstruther and Acland were to sail from England.

The policy of concentration was wise; the folly in the choice of leaders, which made it useless, was supplied by the military authorities. Sir Hew Dalrymple was to be Commander-in-Chief, with Sir Harry Burrard as second in command. Moore, Hope, McKenzie Fraser, and Lord Paget, in command of their respective divisions, were all to take precedence of Wellesley. From being the leader of the expedition he thus suddenly found

himself the junior of six other generals. On active service, however, Wellesley always took a noble reading of a soldier's duty. "Whether I am to command the army or not, or even to quit it," he wrote to Castlereagh, "I shall do my best to ensure its success."

But the choice of new leaders made success impossible. The chief merit of Dalrymple and Burrard in official eyes seems to have been that both were Guardsmen. Burrard had served in America—a very bad school—and had won no distinction there. Dalrymple was nearly sixty years of age; he had served in the Netherlands under the Duke of York—a still worse school than America—and he reflected, with painful accuracy, the loitering generalship of his type. The British forces about to land in Spain had to meet armies and leaders trained in the school of Napoleon; and in choosing a commander for an adventure so perilous to pass over a great soldier like Sir John Moore, or to ignore a brilliant record like that of Wellesley in India, in favour of men like Burrard and Dalrymple, was little less than madness.

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CHAPTER II

THE FIRST FIGHTS

"Roliça was one of our most important affairs; it was terrible hard work to drive off the French. . . . Our men fought monstrous well."—WELLESLEY *to* LORD STANHOPE.

IT was a daring adventure on which Wellesley sailed. There were at that moment 140,000 French troops in Spain, with 400,000 more, the veterans of a score of victories, north of the Pyrenees, ready to join them. These armies had Napoleon's genius to shape their strategy, and marshals trained in Napoleon's school to lead them; and Spain—though British statesmanship may be forgiven for not knowing it—while it offered an unrivalled battlefield, could supply neither transport, nor food, nor effective allies. And Wellesley's 9000 men, with practically no cavalry, and only two troops of the Royal Irish Waggon Guard to horse his guns and do the work of the commissariat, was stepping on this field to meet an array of foes so formidable.

The expedition sailed from Cork on July 12, 1808, but Wellesley pushed on ahead of his heavy trans-

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ports in a swift frigate, devoting his leisure hours on board to the study of the Spanish language with the help of a dictionary and a Spanish version of the Book of Common Prayer, a book still preserved as a relic. He must have had an unusual aptitude for acquiring languages, for by the time he reached Castile he says, "I was perfectly able to understand the addresses of congratulation made to me for some little successes I had had about Oporto."[1]

The landing of the tiny force at Mondego Bay was completed on August 3. If any one who watched the troops falling into line on the beach on that date had been told that their commander would be sailing back to England two months later, the fact would have been accepted as a sufficient proof, either that the adventure itself had failed, or that Wellesley had blundered signally as a leader. It is sometimes forgotten that Wellesley had not one, but two, terms of service in the Peninsula. The first lasted not quite nine weeks. It began with landing at Mondego Bay, August 3, 1808, and ended October 4, when he sailed for England. The second lasted over five years; it began when he reached Lisbon, in command of all the British forces in Spain, on April 22, 1809; it ended when he reached England, travelling *via* Toulouse and Paris, on June 23, 1814. The most

[1] Maxwell, vol. i. p. 98.

famous battles and sieges of the Peninsular War are crowded into this latter period; but that first brief campaign of less than nine weeks, from which Wellesley emerged practically to be tried by court-martial, was in some respects more visibly and instantly successful that even the later and better known chapter in military history.

The actual fighting commenced with a splutter of skirmishing at the outposts at Obidos on August 15; it ended on the 22nd—only seven days later—with Kellerman, one of the most brilliant of the French cavalry leaders, riding into the British headquarters to ask for a suspension of arms, and offer the evacuation of Portugal. Roliça was fought on August 15, Vimiero on August 21. In five days, that is, Wellesley twice defeated the French. In less than three weeks from his landing he had delivered a kingdom, and Portugal, with its capital and fortresses, passed from under the French flag. But for the fact that at the most critical moment Burrard first, Dalrymple later, arrested Wellesley's movements, the world might have seen the surrender of a French army on a more startling scale than that of Dupont at Baylen.

Those who planned the expedition never dreamed of a success so swift and complete; yet—such is the irony of human affairs—the effect of the campaign was to set the United Kingdom in a flame of anger, and almost wreck Wellesley's career!

Wellesley's earliest discovery, after landing his troops, was that his Portuguese allies were absolutely worthless. Freire had a force of 5000 men, but most of them were without arms, all were without discipline, and Freire himself was wrong-headed and impracticable to a degree which would have rendered even Napoleon's Old Guard, under his leadership, useless for military purposes. He required Wellesley to supply his force with arms, with cash, and even with provisions, and he practically claimed the right to determine the whole plan of the campaign. Freire marched as far as Leira with the British, but when he reached that town he seized the very stores of food which had been pledged to Wellesley, and then declined to go further, unless the British undertook to provide rations for his entire force. Wellesley borrowed some infantry and a couple of squadrons of horse from him, put the whole under the command of Colonel Trant, and allowed Freire to wander off on his own account.

Wellesley chose the coast road for his advance, in order to keep touch with his transports, and first got news of the French on August 14. Delaborde, a very capable leader, with a force of about 6000 men — reduced, later, to less than 5000 by the detail of six companies to garrison Peniche — was in his front, guarding the road to Lisbon. Loison, marching at speed from Santarem, was

on his way to join Delaborde. Junot's plan was that both forces should unite and hold the road to Lisbon against the British till, having gathered all his fighting strength, he was ready for the battle on which hung the fate of Portugal.

Leaving his heavy baggage at Leira, Wellesley pushed on, and on the 15th his leading detachments—some companies of the 60th and 95th Rifles—clashed with the French outposts in front of Obidos. The men were eager, and ran in on the French with such rash fire, and pushed them back so persistently, that they came within reach of Delaborde's rear-guard, and were roughly handled, losing two officers and twenty-seven rank and file killed and wounded. "The troops," wrote Wellesley, "behaved remarkably well, though not with great prudence." Lieutenant Bunbury of the 95th was killed, the first British officer to fall in the long succession of Peninsular campaigns.

As Delaborde fell back, he reached a point where he had to make his choice betwixt perilous alternatives. He was equidistant from Loison, who was pushing on to join him, and Lisbon, which he had to guard against Wellesley's advance. If he moved towards Loison, he left the road to Lisbon open; if he fell farther back on the road to Lisbon, he risked his communications with Loison. He elected to make a stand at Roliça. It was a gallant choice; for if Wellesley flung his

whole force upon him, he would have to meet the shock of 13,000 with only 5000. But both Wellesley's generalship, and the fighting qualities of the British soldier, were at that moment unknown quantities, and Delaborde had just confidence in himself and in his hardy veterans. The fight which followed was, said Wellesley, "the fiercest and most bloody for the number engaged I ever saw." It is memorable as being the first in which French and British tried their strength against each other in the Peninsula.

The road to Lisbon as it approaches Roliça traverses a sandy plain, with wall-like lines of hills on either hand. Roliça itself is the name of a high ridge which lies across the plain like a rough bar, touching the lateral hills at its extremities. A mile behind it is a second, and still loftier, ridge, with a narrower front, thick with scrub and scored deep with ravines. Delaborde thus had two positions. The first was strong; if driven from it, the second might well be found almost impregnable. He hoped to hold these positions till Loison joined him, and together they would bar Wellesley's advance on the capital till Junot brought up all his forces.

Wellesley's superiority of force determined his tactics in this fight. He held back his centre, while Trant, with some battalions of Portuguese infantry, climbed the heights to the west, and

Fergusson, with two brigades and six guns, pushed over the hills to the east, thus turning both extremities of the French ridge. The British army resembled, in a word, a crab thrusting its two claws round the flanks of Delaborde's position. But Delaborde was a fine soldier; his men were familiar with battle, and had the cool adroitness of veterans. He held his position till Trant and Fergusson were showing on either flank, and the skirmishers in the British centre were vexing his front. Then his wary and quick-footed veterans slipped from betwixt the tips of Wellesley's claws, and fell swiftly back on the narrow, and much more difficult, position to the rear.

Wellesley followed patiently, and repeated his tactics, thrusting out his claws afresh, and across more difficult country, to turn the French flanks, holding back his centre meanwhile until the turning movements had their effect. But the eagerness of his regiments disarranged his plans. The 9th and 29th pushed forward from his centre up the rugged front of the hill held by the French, and when they were engaged it was necessary to support them.

Four deep, water-worn gullies corrugated the steep slope, each rough with stones, and matted with scrub. The 29th and the 9th in support should have taken the ravine to the right, but, led by its too eager colonel, Lake, it not only

pushed on too soon, and too far; it took the wrong track. The inner ravine seemed to Lake obviously the right one, since it ran like a gash in the hillside straight towards the centre of the French position; and to a British soldier, what better path could be wished than that which led him by the shortest way to his enemy's front? But the ravine narrowed as it climbed to the dimensions of a mere wrinkle. The track over the water-worn rocks was fit only for goats; it certainly offered no space for a charging column of infantry. It ran deep into the centre of the French position, too, before it mounted, by a steep ascent, to the crest, so that, upon the breathless, straggling, perspiring files in red, at the bottom of the ravine, a deadly musketry fire was poured from either flank and from the ridge ahead.

The dogged files pushed on, however, till they reached the summit, and as the men, breathless and disordered, clambered out of the ravine they tried to form. In front was a line of Swiss, who, curiously enough, did not fire upon them, some of them turning up the butts of their muskets, others shouting they were friends. The spectacle for a moment puzzled the British, and arrested their rush. Then, before the broken files had shaken themselves into order, there came a sudden shout and the sound of running feet from the rear. Some French companies, who had been firing down

the ravine upon the flanks of the climbing British, found they were likely to be cut off. They were veterans; they fell at a word into column formation, and, splendidly led, ran in upon the disordered line of the 29th, swept through it and over it, killing its colonel, Lake, and carrying off in triumph six of its officers and thirty of its rank and file. The shattered 29th fell back for a little distance down the slope, but re-formed, aided by the 9th, and climbed again to the summit.

Delaborde held his position gallantly. Three times his veterans flung themselves upon the heads of the British columns, as they emerged from one or other of the ravines, and pushed them back. But the British were not to be denied. They came on a fourth time, and broke through, now at one point, then at another, along the crest, and made good their footing. By this time, too, Wellesley's "claws" were reaching for both ends of Delaborde's position, but that adroit soldier cleverly slipped free again.

His retreat was a fine bit of soldiership. Four battalions formed his rear-guard, and two, in turn, held back the pursuit while the other two doubled to the rear. This was done again and again, some squadrons of French horse helping the infantry by riding in gallantly upon the leading files of the British. A mile to the rear, the line of retreat ran through a difficult pass. Here the French

commander's dainty tactics were no longer practicable. The British were too close, and the pursuit was too determined, to allow the pass to be held, and Delaborde was roughly handled, and had to leave three of his guns behind. But the whole fight was a proof of the gallant Frenchman's skill. He had held two positions, in turn, against an enemy greatly superior in strength to himself, and had escaped undestroyed.

It was a bloody fight. The forces actually engaged probably did not exceed 5000 men, but of this number the French lost 700 in killed, wounded, and missing; the British nearly 500. Delaborde, by a long night march, put himself beyond Wellesley's reach, but the British had gained their end, and the road to Lisbon lay open before them. Delaborde himself was wounded. The colonel of the 29th, Lake, the son of Lake of Indian fame, was a soldier of brilliant promise. He was standing, bareheaded, in front of his regiment, waving his hat and calling upon his men to follow, when he was shot. The last word that passed his lips was, "Forward."

Junot, if not a great general, was, at least, a daring and impatient soldier, and he realised that the fate of Lisbon must be decided outside the city itself. It hung on the result of a battle in the open with the British, and he hurried to put his fortunes to the test. He left a sufficient garrison

to hold the city, made the best arrangement he could with the Russian fleet, at that moment in the Tagus, sent ahead his main body, and on the night of August 15, started himself with the reserve. He moved so fast that, on the afternoon of the 17th, he heard far off among the hills faint pulses of sound—the distant thunder of the guns at Roliça. Loison joined him on the same day, Delaborde on the 19th; so that by the 20th, with all his available force—roughly 14,000 men—more than 2000 being cavalry—and twenty-three guns, he was within striking distance of the British.

CHAPTER III

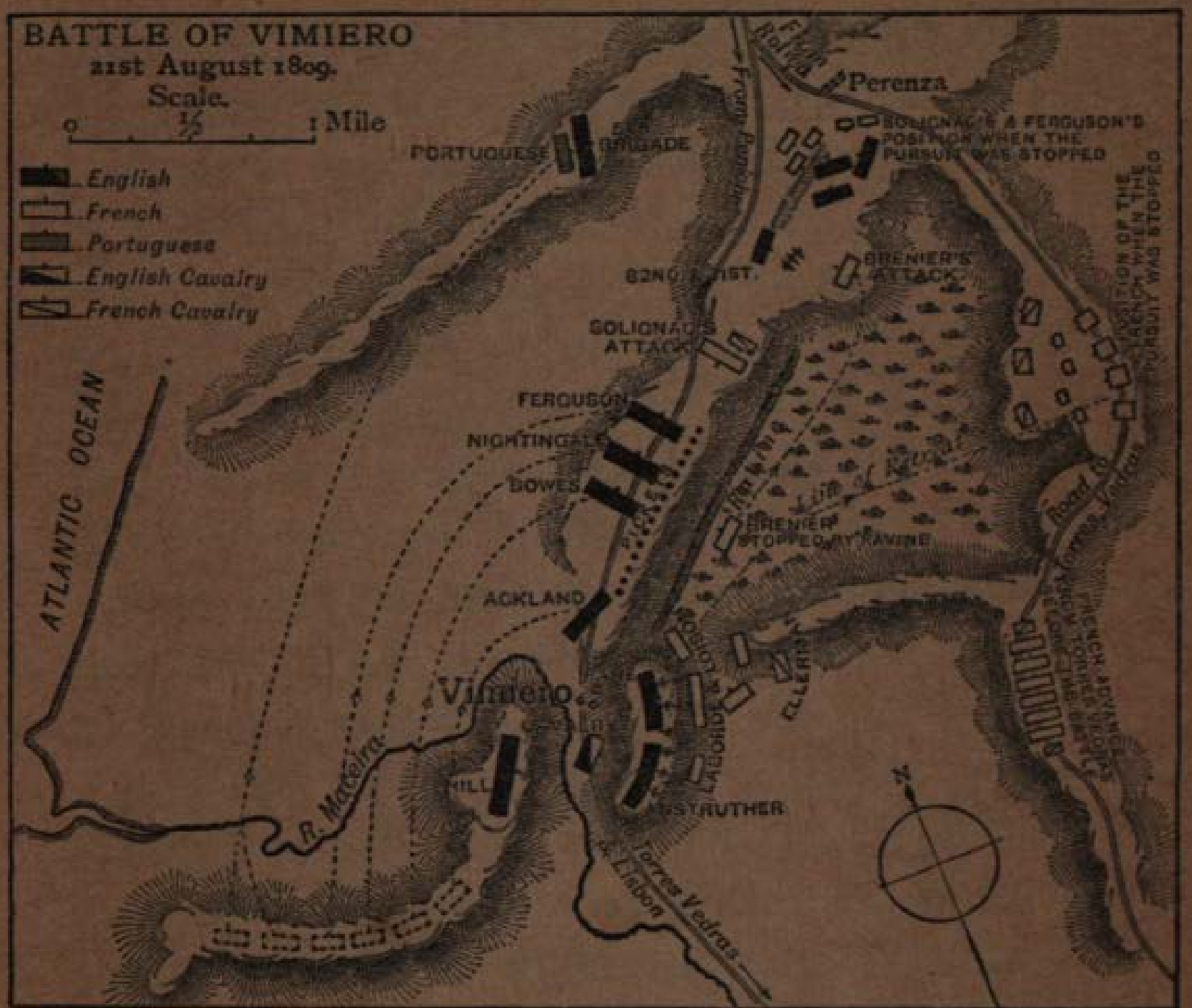
VIMIERO AND THE CONVENTION

"I am too much accustomed to receive blame for the actions of others to feel much concern upon the subject, and I can only endeavour not to deserve any for my own."—WELLESLEY.

WELLESLEY had halted after his fight with Delaborde. He learned of the arrival off the coast of reinforcements under Anstruther and Acland, and he took up a position at Vimiero to cover their disembarkation. This was a dangerous and tedious business, as the surf breaks heavily on the sands at the mouth of the Maceira; but the troops landed, adding 4000 good infantry to his strength, and this was worth waiting for. Amongst the regiments were the 43rd and the 52nd, forming part of what was afterwards the immortal Light Division. On the morning of the 21st—the day of the battle—the disembarkation was still incomplete, but Wellesley had over 16,000 British troops, besides Trant's Portuguese, nearly 2000 strong, under his hand. He knew Junot was approaching at speed, and he chose his ground for the coming fight.

It was a long ridge, rough and steep, in outline an obtuse triangle. The river Maceira, with its narrow valley, breaks through the apex of the triangle. On its bank, in the very throat of the gap, stood Vimiero, a straggling village; in front rose a solitary hill with a sharp ascent, its slopes covered with vineyards and thickets. Wellesley made this hill the key of his position, holding it with the brigades of Fane and Anstruther. Fergusson's brigade, with Trant's Portuguese, was drawn up across the narrow valley behind the village. Wellesley had put his strongest brigades—those of Hill, Nightingale, Acland, and Bowes—on the ridge running back southward towards the coast, which formed the right of his position. His left was slenderly held, as he did not expect to be attacked there; and Junot showed at least one sign of good generalship—he struck at his enemy where he was least expected.

Wellesley was busy arranging his line of battle when he learnt that Sir Harry Burrard had arrived. He came, characteristically enough, in the last and slowest ship, at the tail of Acland's convoy, and with his arrival the chance of commanding a British army against one of Napoleon's chief lieutenants seemed to slip out of Wellesley's hands. Sir Harry Burrard, however, showed no signs of coming ashore. His army, it is true, was falling into position for battle, but even that circumstance



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did not quicken the slow blood in that leisurely general's veins, or hasten his movements. Haste, in Sir Harry Burrard's code of military ethics, was an inconvenient virtue, if not, indeed, a vice.

Wellesley went off through the surf to his new general and put him in possession of the state of affairs. Burrard listened, forbade any offensive movement on the part of the troops, and then announced that he was resolved to stay on board ship for another night. The stern joys of battle, the uncertain chances of victory, were not to be allowed to rob him of one more comfortable night's sleep. Meanwhile everything was to wait until Sir John Moore's force, 10,000 strong, arrived—or Sir Harry Burrard had finished his slumbers. Wellesley had to struggle back to shore through the heavy sea, leaving his superior officer to the enjoyment of peaceful repose.

But the question whether a battle should be fought was settled, not by Sir Harry Burrard, or even by Wellesley, but by Junot. That impatient soldier knew that while he had no hope of reinforcements, delay might bring many to the British, and he wasted no time. At midnight, while Sir Harry Burrard, it may be hoped, was well on his second sleep, the British outposts caught a far-off rumbling sound in the hills. It was not thunder, nor yet the sound of guns; it was the rattle of Junot's artillery and transport waggons

crossing the long wooden bridge leading to the village of Facaia. The news was carried in to Wellesley, and his brigades were ordered to be under arms, and in position, an hour before dawn.

There was a pause, however, in Junot's advance. Like a wise soldier, he had halted to rest his men, and let them cook their breakfast. But by nine o'clock, clouds of dust rising high from a fold in the hills told that the French were coming. Presently they broke out of the pass, deployed into a broad front, with some cavalry squadrons leading, and came steadily on. The British were puzzled to find that Junot's columns were of an odd complexion. The familiar dark-blue tint had vanished; the columns coming on to the beat of the drum were of a dingy brown. It was summer time; the French infantry wore white linen frocks, and carried their blue uniform coats buttoned over their knapsacks.

Wellesley believed he had guessed the point at which Junot would strike, and he expected to see his battalions wheel to the left, so as to threaten the right of the British position. But Junot had other tactics. A bugle-call rang out, the cavalry squadrons leading wheeled to the right and pushed northward, a long column of infantry followed, while the main body of the French halted in front of the isolated hill, which formed the British centre. With one sure glance, Wellesley read his opponent's plan of

battle. He intended to strike heavily at the British centre, and, when the fury of battle was raging there, would turn its left flank, and roll it back in confusion.

Wellesley stands high amongst the great soldiers of all time for the sure judgment, the cool and swift decision with which he met all the changing fortunes of the battlefield. He watched the French for a moment, then gave a quiet order. Instantly, four of his brigades—those of Acland, Nightingale, Fergusson, and Bowes—with six guns, were marching at speed from his centre and right to the ridge on the British left, and, as they moved below the hill-crest, Junot could not see how the position on which his right wing was about to hurl itself was being strengthened. Yet Junot had at least a gleam of a good soldier's insight. He guessed what Wellesley would do. Brennier's division was marching at the quick-step to turn Wellesley's flank, and Junot despatched another column under Solignac to support Brennier. But this movement dislocated the French line of battle. A wide gap stretched betwixt the force Junot was holding in hand for his stroke at Wellesley's centre and the brigades with which he hoped to turn the British left. The gap in his front, however, brought no counter-stroke from Wellesley; he had no cavalry, and was standing on the defensive.

Junot struck swiftly and fiercely at Wellesley's

centre. The attacking force consisted of two brigades of infantry, with seven guns, Kellerman with four battalions of Grenadiers being in reserve. The French excel in attack; their tirailleurs ran forward, a fringe of daring skirmishers; the battalions followed in close and massive columns. Across the track along which they came stood the 52nd and 97th, a long, thin, steadfast line of red, hidden as yet from the French by a fold in the ground. The French attack was gallant; their columns came up the hill with loud shouts, and a venomous crackle of musketry from the leading files. The British batteries barked at them in vain. The skirmishers of the 52nd and 97th were driven in; the charging French broke into a tempest of exultant cries.

But as they reached the summit of the low ridge, the long line of red infantry came into sight. It flashed into fierce volleys, and that wide and dreadful front of fire brought the French to an instant standstill. As they halted, the extremities of the British line swung forward so that the head of the French attack was practically shut within a sort of obtuse triangle of flame. Nothing could stand against these sustained and rolling volleys, and the French column was swept in wreck and confusion down the hill. Delaborde himself led in that charge, and led it gallantly, and was again wounded.

Junot was an obstinate fighter. He rallied his men, pushed his guns nearer the British position,

and sent forward his columns again. But the second attack failed in shorter time, and with even more disastrous slaughter, than the first. While the combat, with its eddies of smoke and blasts of musketry fire, was, for the second time, still rolling down the hill, Junot struck once more, but it was much in the spirit of a gambler who thrusts his last coin on the table. Two battalions of Grenadiers, veteran soldiers, formed his sole reserve, and Kellerman himself took them into the fight. Instead of climbing the front of the contested hill, he pushed past its flank, into the gap betwixt it and the heights to the north, and here for the moment the French found no dreadful line of volleying infantry across their path, though the fire from either flank was heavy. Acland, who had the reserve of Wellesley's left wing, saw that Kellerman was likely to break through, so he flung some companies of the 95th and of the 43rd on the flank of the French column, and brought it to a standstill. This gave time for the 43rd to strike at its head. The fighting was fierce and close, for the French were veterans, unaccustomed to defeat; but the men of the 95th and 43rd were not to be denied. After the battle, 120 French Grenadiers were lying at this spot, slain with the bayonet, a fact which shows how close was the struggle, and how furious was the valour, on both sides

At last, out of the smoke and tumult, came the wreck of Kellerman's broken column, and Junot knew he had failed. He sent forward a dragoon regiment to cover the retreat of his shattered Grenadiers; Wellesley had only two slender squadrons — 240 men in all — of the 20th Light Dragoons, but he launched these at the broken French infantry and the cavalry covering their retreat. Two squadrons of Portuguese horse started in the charge with the British, but after galloping a few paces drew rein, swung round, and rode to the rear. The 20th, however, with Colonel Taylor leading, rode home on the French dragoons, broke through them into the retreating Grenadiers, and cut them up cruelly; nor did they draw rein until checked by a stone wall; then two French cavalry regiments charged their flank and in turn broke them up, their colonel, Taylor, being left dead on the scene of the fight.

Junot's thrice repeated attempt to break through Wellesley's centre had failed; the story of his attack on the British left remains to be told.

When Brennier judged that he had reached the point where he could turn Wellesley's flank, he swung his columns inward, and then found to his disgust that a deep ravine, with steep banks, formed a sort of dry ditch to the ridge on which the British stood. He had to set his battalions again on the march in search of a point where he could cross.

The second French division under Solignac came in due course to the same ravine, contrived in some way to cross it, and proceeded to climb the slope. They saw nothing before them but a few British skirmishers. Just over the brow of the hill, however, were the 36th, the 40th, the 71st, and the 82nd—drawn up two-deep. The men were lying down, and the hill-top seemed empty; but as the heads of Solignac's battalions made their appearance above the curving ridge, the British suddenly stood up—a far-stretching line, overlapping the French to right and left. At the word of command, that menacing red line came swiftly on. From officer to officer ran some brief order; the muskets rose to a level; a ragged edge of flame broke out along the whole front, and the converging volley simply tore the heads of the leading French battalions into fragments. Then through the smoke the shaken French saw the British line advancing—a majestic two-deep front of over 2000 bayonets. Solignac's veterans clung for a few desperate moments to the hill-slope, then they broke away down it in disorder, leaving their guns behind them. The 36th and 40th pressed on the disordered columns, but the 71st and 82nd drew to a halt round the captured guns and the men fell out of their ranks.

At that moment Brennier, who, in his turn, had crossed the ravine and climbed the ridge,

and was now in search of the British line, made his appearance on the hill summit above the two regiments clustered about the captured guns. He was a good soldier, he had four battalions of infantry under his command, and he struck instantly. His men, in column formation, came at the double down the hill, two squadrons of dragoons riding with them in the charge. The guns were recaptured in an instant, and the British were driven back in disorder. They rallied, however, the 29th from the second line joined them, and Brennier's column was tumbled into flight.

It was a great moment for Wellesley when he watched the last of Junot's column recoil, broken and defeated, from his front. He had met one of Napoleon's chosen commanders on equal terms, and had both out-generalled and out-fought him. When Brennier, wounded and a prisoner, was brought to him, the single question the agitated Frenchman asked was "whether Kellerman had charged." That question told Wellesley's quick mind the whole state of affairs with the French. Kellerman commanded Junot's last reserve, and Brennier wanted to know whether it had been thrown to the fight. Kellerman *had* charged, and been routed, and Wellesley knew that his enemy had practically fired his last cartridge and used his last bayonet and sabre. His forecasting

genius read in a moment all the possible issues of the victory. The day was early, there were 9000 British troops who, as yet, had not fired a shot. Hill's brigade had only to be sent along the Lisbon road, and Junot would be cut off from the Torres Vedras pass and from Lisbon, and be thrust into the tangle of wild hills about Santarem. He might be driven to surrender, and such a success would give a new energy to public opinion in support of the war in great Britain itself; the news would run like fire through Spain and fan the rising there to a new intensity. The event would be felt in every camp and Court throughout Europe.

He turned eagerly to Burrard, who was by this time on the field. "Sir Harry," he said, "now is your time to advance. The enemy is completely beaten, and we shall be in Lisbon in three days." But in Sir Harry Burrard's opinion, hurry was one of the most hateful things. The army had done enough. Why should it do any more? At that moment an aide-de-camp rode up from Fergusson, reporting that Solignac's broken columns were in a gap in the hills and could be captured. But even that did not shake Sir Harry Burrard's resolve to "do no more," and the troops were ordered back to their quarters, leaving Junot astonished at the absence of pursuit, and practically the entire British army, down to the youngest drummer boy, swearing with disgust at the escape

of their enemy. "There is nothing for us soldiers to do here," said Wellesley bitterly to his aide-de-camp, "except to go and shoot red-legged partridges."

Sir Harry Burrard, having thus frozen victory at the moment of its triumph, no doubt enjoyed another comfortable night's repose. The next morning Sir Hew Dalrymple appeared on the scene, and Sir Harry's office as Commander-in-Chief came to an end. It had lasted not quite twenty-four hours, but during that brief period he had achieved two remarkable results. He had robbed the British army of the natural fruits of its victory, and he had saved Junot's army from destruction.

Sir Hew Dalrymple was as slow-minded and as leisurely as Sir Harry Burrard, and a good many years older; so the habit of caution in him was naturally stronger still, and caution, in Sir Hew Dalrymple—where Wellesley was concerned—was made more sensitive by jealousy. Wellesley was called into the presence of the two generals and required to explain his plans. It was like an eagle trying to explain to two elderly barn-door fowls its theory of flight. Wellesley proposed that Moore with his force of 10,000 men should advance to Santarem and turn the eastern flank at Torres Vedras, while he, himself, turned its western extremity; the two forces would then join hands

before Lisbon. It was a daring plan, since it involved the division of the British forces, but Wellesley had not only mastered the geography of the country, he read the mind of his opponent and made a just estimate of his strength; so he was sure of his plan. Junot would attempt no second stroke; he would probably cross the Spanish frontier and endeavour to fight his way through Spain to join Bessières.

But Dalrymple sniffed with chilly contempt at this reading of the situation. Wellesley, he was persuaded, had acted with "great rashness" already, and would act still more "rashly" in future if not controlled by more prudent minds than his own. "In the first interview that I had with Sir Hew Dalrymple," said Wellesley afterwards, "I had reason to believe that I did not possess his confidence; nay, more, that he was prejudiced against any opinions I should give him."

In his own slow way Dalrymple prepared to move on the 23rd, but explained that he would wait for active operations against Junot until Moore joined him, which could not be till a week later. These two remarkable generals, in a word, arranged to give Junot nine days in which to recover from his defeat, and prepare for the defence of Lisbon. But while Dalrymple was slowly "getting ready" to move, a piquet of Portuguese cavalry galloped into the camp and reported the French army to be

approaching. The troops ran to arms, but the French "army" dwindled as it drew near into a squadron of French horse, with General Kellerman riding at its head, carrying a white flag. He came to propose a suspension of hostilities, for the purpose of drawing up an agreement by which the French would surrender Portugal. Kellerman's arrival, at all events, showed that Wellesley had read the whole situation, and the mind of his enemy, with perfect accuracy.

Had Junot been Masséna, he would have held on to Lisbon and Portugal, even after his defeat at Vimiero; but he had the defects of his temperament. His courage was of the effervescent order; it was fierce, but was easily chilled. He moved swiftly, and had struck at the British gallantly, but his stroke had failed, and he was not of the stubborn and dogged temperament that fights long against disaster. If he could make reasonably honourable terms the surrender of Portugal seemed to him a small price to pay to save his army, with all its booty, from the fate of that of Dupont. So Kellerman came riding into the British headquarters with his white flag, and a proposal for a convention. He came, in his own words, to "see if he could get the army out of the mouse-trap."

The envoy was astonished to find he had to deal, not with the keen and masterful soldier who had held the ridges of Vimiero so stubbornly, but with a slow-minded general of the ancient school, in the

person of Dalrymple. The quick-witted Frenchman soon read Dalrymple's limitations—his ignorance of the situation, his reluctance to risk another battle, his exaggerated sense of Junot's strength—and he promptly enlarged his terms. The negotiations were long and tedious, and as a result, the much-debated, fiercely abused Convention of Cintra—as it is incorrectly termed—was drawn up. As Kellerman was an officer of an inferior rank to himself, Dalrymple desired Wellesley to sign the agreement. Wellesley's cold reason approved of the substance of the Convention. It was a gain to have the whole of Portugal, with its capital and its fortresses, surrendered without a shot being fired; but there were clauses in the agreement to which he strongly objected, and these were exactly the clauses which, when they were published, made British opinion furious.

The Convention offended the Portuguese, since it was concluded without reference to them, and it profoundly exasperated opinion in Great Britain. What the Convention did not contain affronted British sentiment as much as what it did. Dalrymple might have required the exchange of British prisoners of war in France for Junot's troops, or he might have demanded that the French army should surrender all the public and private plunder with which its baggage was congested. Convents, churches, libraries, art galleries, had been rifled by the French with

tireless industry. Junot under the Convention was entitled to send an officer to France with news of the Convention to the Emperor. This officer's baggage was free from examination, and included the choicest books and many valuable MSS. from the Royal Library of Lisbon. Junot's own baggage was rich in valuable specimens of natural history stolen from the Public Museum. After the Convention was signed, indeed, Junot plundered the Supreme Court of Lisbon, carrying off coin to the value of £25,000, made up of the moneys of litigants held by the court.

How did it come to pass that while Spanish troops and generals had been able to compel the surrender of a French army, British troops and generals had allowed a defeated French army to sail away in British transports, with flags, and guns, and the plunder of a kingdom? Sir Hew Dalrymple's incorrigible habit of loitering did him, at this moment, great injury. The protests of the Portuguese authorities against the Convention reached London before the terms of the Convention itself; so that the most objectionable clauses in it were at first the only ones known.

With much trouble and delay, and many private assassinations of French officers and soldiers by the exasperated Portuguese, Junot's army was got afloat, and carried with it much plunder, though much was arrested in transit. It still numbered over 25,000 good soldiers.

After the Convention Dalrymple made a feeble effort to find a use for Wellesley. He proposed to send him into Spain as his agent; but Wellesley declined the proposal. "Such an agent," he wrote, "should possess the confidence of those who employ him. . . . He should be acquainted with the plans of his employers, the means by which they propose to carry them into execution. . . . I certainly cannot consider myself as possessing those advantages . . . and you must be the best judge as to whether you have made up your own mind, and are inclined to confide in me to the extent which, in my opinion, would be necessary in order to derive any general advantage from such a mission." As Wellesley told the House of Commons afterwards: "From the first hour these officers landed, nay, even before they landed, I clearly perceived that I was not in possession of their confidence. I did everything I could, however, to forward their objects, though I differed from them in opinion."[1]

Wellesley practically found himself unemployed, and mistrusted, and on September 17 obtained leave to return to England to attend to his duties as Irish Secretary.

When he landed in London, public opinion against the Convention was furious, and, to his astonishment and wrath, Wellesley discovered that he himself was the chief object of public execration.

[1] "Despatches," iv. p. 138.

He was hooted in the streets, caricatured in the Press, attacked in the House of Commons. He had fought two battles in seven days and won them both, but this was forgotten. His signature was on the hated Convention, and he was, for a time, looked upon as its chief author. Wellesley, as when the mob, many years later, broke the windows of Apsley House, bore himself with silent and haughty scorn, but his anger was deep. His victories had been robbed of their natural fruit; his plan of action had been rejected; he had been displaced in command by two elderly and slow-minded generals; he was now threatened with the fate of Byng. He had, as many instances in his career show, a sufficient sense of his own value and a capacity for unforgetting resentment, and if he had possessed, say, Carlyle's gift of splenetic utterance, or if some military and sympathising Boswell had listened to his private talk, and reported it, his biography at this stage would make interesting literature. But Wellesley had a wise gift for silence.

While the attack on him, however, was loudest he suggested to Castlereagh that he might ride in his carriage to the King's Levee. Castlereagh, although a loyal friend, was a politician, with a politician's sensitiveness to the shouts of the crowd, and with some hesitation he advised his friend not to attend the levee; "the crowd was violent," &c. Wellesley — as he told the story afterwards to

Croker—replied that "at first I only proposed to attend the levee as a matter of respect due to the King, but now it becomes a question of self-respect and duty to my own character." He insisted on knowing whether this advice not to go to the levee proceeded in any degree from His Majesty. "I will go to the levee to-morrow," he added, "or I will never go to a levee in my life."

In public affairs, however, Wellesley held that private resentments had no place, and anger kindled by personal injuries no office. A court of inquiry was appointed; it consisted of six general officers, with Sir David Dundas as president, and was instructed to inquire into "the causes and circumstances" of the Convention, as well as the conduct of the generals; and Burrard and Dalrymple were recalled to appear before it. Wellesley was characteristically honest in his statement to the court. Burrard, he said, "had fair military grounds" for arresting the advance of the British army at Vimiero; but he declared his conviction that, "if he had been allowed to follow up that battle, there would have been no need of concluding the Convention which had given so much offence." Dalrymple had shaken his head at the "rashness" of his strategy. "I will ask this court," said Wellesley, "what would have been said, and deservedly said, and felt, of me throughout the army and the country, and by the Government by which

I was trusted, if, with such a force I had hesitated to advance upon the enemy." He defended with overpowering strength of reason his plan of adopting the line by the sea coast and depending for supplies upon the shipping. "The communication," he said, "was so short that it defended itself. I was enabled to keep my force collected in one body, and I had my arsenals and magazines close to me whenever I required to communicate with them." But Wellesley was magnanimous to his opponents. He defended that part of the Convention which accepted the surrender of Portugal at the price of the escape of Junot's army. It saved at least three months of time and a tragical cost of life and suffering.

The seven generals came to a finding so deliciously vague that it was sent back to them for re-consideration. In their final report they agreed—but by a majority of only one vote—highly to commend Wellesley's management of the army, and his conduct of the two fights. They declined to say whether or not the pursuit after the battle of the 21st could have been effective; they commented, with mild severity, on the extraordinary arrangement which gave the unhappy British army three different commanders in twenty-four hours, and ended by the healing statement that "unquestionable zeal and firmness appear throughout to have been exhibited by all three of the generals concerned."

This finding was accepted, though the Cabinet,

through the lips of the King, expressed its disapproval of some clauses in the Convention, and severely rebuked Dalrymple for failing to forward to London till September 4 the terms of an armistice which was agreed upon on August 22. This leisurely general, it seems, loitered even in his correspondence with the King. Wellesley, in a private letter at the time, described the report as "an extraordinary production." "Opinions, like colours," he said, "are now matters of taste, and may in this view of them be inconsistent with each other. But a court of this description ought, if it touches facts, to state them correctly." Byron, in some stanzas of "Childe Harold," afterwards withdrawn from publication, expressed the more angry mood of public feeling on the whole subject:

"But Mercy cloak'd the babes beneath her wing;
And as they spared our foes, so spared we them;
(Where was the pity of our sires for Byng?)
Yet knaves, not idiots, should the law condemn;
Then live, ye gallant knight, and bless your judges' phlegm!"

Wellesley at this period must have felt that fate was very cruel to him. That a pair of drowsy generals like Sir Harry Burrard and Sir Hew Dalrymple should wreck his campaign was cruel, but it was the very irony of injustice that at the end he should stand linked in public opprobrium with them as having betrayed the honour of the British flag. The injury to his own fame was bad, but partnership in their ignominy was more exasperating still. He

was fighting for his own professional existence before seven elderly major-generals in a room at Greenwich Hospital when he ought to have been commanding a British army against the French in Spain. This was an absurd anti-climax which was certainly not in his calculation when he sailed in command of the British forces from Cork.

Wellesley during the six weeks the court of inquiry was in session must have often looked beyond the venerable heads of the seven generals to Spanish landscapes, which Napoleon was just then filling with the thunders of his guns, and shaking with the tread of his battalions. During the last week of the inquiry, his thoughts may well have turned, with a sort of stern impatience, to the wild Galician hills where Moore's sullen regiments, pinched with hunger, and whipped by storms, were on their retreat to Corunna. Wellesley, perhaps, was the one man in the three kingdoms who understood the strategy of Moore's campaign, and the degree in which the fate of Spain hung upon it. It was his own conception; he probably understood it better than even Moore himself. He had, at all events, a greater faith in it, and he ought to have been playing a part in it. Instead, he was fretting his reserved and proud spirit while listening to Sir Hew Dalrymple demonstrating the "rashness" with which he had advanced to Roliça, and fought at Vimiero.

Burrard and Dalrymple found no further em-

ployment, but Wellesley's figure was too masterful, and his performances too notable, to be destroyed by a passing burst of unjust public anger. The keener minds of the nation, at all events, recognised his genius. Walter Scott, in a letter to Lockhart, written at the time, said: "I would to God Wellesley were now at the head of the English in Spain. His late examination shows his acute and decisive talents for command; and although I believe in my conscience that when he found himself superseded, he suffered the pigs to run through the business, when he might in some measure have prevented them,

> "'Yet give the haughty devil his due;
> Though bold his quarterings, they are true.'"

Perhaps the most gracious light shed on Wellesley's somewhat hard character is supplied by a letter which he wrote to Sir John Moore before leaving Portugal. Moore and Wellesley belonged to different schools in politics, and politics in those days counted for much; but Wellesley was too good a soldier not to recognise Moore's great gifts. On September 17, while still sore from his dealings with Dalrymple, he wrote to Moore: "It is quite impossible that we can go on as we are now constituted. The Commander-in-Chief must be changed, and the country and the army naturally turn their eyes to you as their commander." He would use, he said, every effort to get him appointed, and would gladly serve under him.

CHAPTER IV

FRENCH AND BRITISH BATTLE-METHODS

"'Tis strange that with this little army we are able to keep them in check."—WELLESLEY.

WELLESLEY was accustomed to look back on Vimiero with peculiar satisfaction. It seemed to him a model fight. In the report of the action which he sent to Sir Harry Burrard he said: "This is the only action that I have ever been in, in which everything passed as it was directed, and no mistake was made by any of the officers charged with its conduct." He could not say this of Roliça. The two fights, as a matter of fact, were quite unlike each other in character. At Roliça, Wellesley was attacking, and it is clear that his adroit opponent evaded his stroke. Wellesley's combinations were too deliberate, not to say too slow, to catch Delaborde's agile battalions. The test of good generalship is to be strongest at the point of contact with the enemy. Wellesley had more than double the strength of Delaborde, but less than one-half his troops took part in the fight; and while he might have overwhelmed his

opponent, he only succeeded in fighting him on equal terms. This cannot be regarded as an example of successful generalship. Wellesley could, on occasion, strike with lightning-like swiftness, as he showed, for example, at Assaye, at the Douro, at Salamanca, and at Vittoria, but there is no gleam of that swiftness visible at Roliça.

At Vimiero, however, Wellesley was fighting on the defensive. The French were attacking, and Wellesley's generalship is shown in the certainty with which he read Junot's plan of attack, and the speed with which he carried his brigades from the right wing, where they were out of the fight, to his left wing, where they stood ready to crush the French columns as they climbed the slope to turn his left.

All the characteristic features of Wellesley's generalship, in fact, emerge at Vimiero. He made use of a new form of battle, and one which exactly suited the British temper. The Continental generals delighted in display. As preparation for battle, horse, foot, and artillery were spread out in many-coloured parallelograms, all visible—to the last man and horse and gun—on the slope of a range of hills, or on some vast plain. Who does not remember the magnificent display of his army, as many-tinted as a rainbow, which Napoleon offered to the gaze of the unmoved British on the morning of Waterloo?

Wellington's plan was to conceal his strength. His brigades were hidden behind a hill-crest, in a dip of the ground, or under the screen of the houses and hedges of a village. All the enemy saw was a fringe of skirmishers, a few cavalry pickets, and scattered clusters of guns. But when the skirmishers were driven in, and the breathless French battalions had just reached—and imagined they had carried—the hostile position, then the long, red line, steady and silent—but terrible—suddenly broke into sight. In a moment it flamed into shattering volleys. "At the end of the war," says Professor Oman, "the French marshals grew very chary of attacking any position where Wellington showed fight; for they never could tell whether they were opposed by a mere rear-guard, or by a whole army skilfully concealed."

It was exactly so at Vimiero; Delaborde's column striking at Wellesley's centre, and Solignac's breathless battalions climbing the ridge to the left, had no expectation of the long line of steadfast infantry which awaited them till it was too late to escape its destructive fire.

At Vimiero, in a word, Wellesley put his theory—that in the shock of battle the line would always beat the column—to the test, and found it held good. It is absurd to say that Wellesley invented the line as an answer to the attack of the column. Stuart had used it brilliantly at Maida. It was as

old as Prussian tactics in the wars of Frederick. The French onfall in columns of companies—with a front of forty, or at the most of eighty men, and a depth of perhaps eighteen—was really preceded by an attack in line, in the shape of a thick, far-stretching spray of tirailleurs; and the French excelled in this skirmishing attack. They ran forward with great daring, and tormented, almost to the point of disorganisation, the battalions of the enemy. Then the onfall of the solid columns usually proved irresistible.

Now, Wellesley met this preliminary attack of the French tirailleurs with an answering line of light infantry; and the fighting betwixt these two irregular fronts was commonly both obstinate and bloody. At Barossa, for example — which was fought on Wellesley's methods, though it was not one of his fights — the covering screen of light troops lost fourteen out of twenty officers, and more than half its rank and file; and all this before the column and the line closed on each other. Wellesley's plan was to hold off the French tirailleurs with his light infantry till the French columns were close up; then the skirmishers ran back through the intervals, and the massive column and the long, thin, steadfast line met in the shock of a charge; and always the line beat the column. As Professor Oman puts it: "800 men in the two-deep line which Wellington loved, could all

use their muskets, and thus pour 800 bullets per volley into a French battalion of the same strength; which, from its narrow front, could only return, at most, 160." The men in the centre of the French column invariably fired in the air. If the column tried to deploy, as each company struggled out from the mass, it was shattered by musketry fire. Foy himself, in his private journal, records that "for a set battle of equal numbers on a limited front, the English infantry could always beat the French. I keep this opinion," he adds "to myself; I have never divulged it."[1]

It must be added that the British had a better weapon than the French, and knew better how to use it. The old Brown Bess carried spherical bullets, twelve to the pound. It was deadly within a range of 100 yards, and the coolness of the men enabled them to use it with destructive effect. The French musket was a smaller bore, carrying bullets weighing seventeen to the pound. It is easy to understand how the better musket, the heavier bullet, and the wider front of fire, completely overmastered the French attack in column.

At Roliça, Wellesley, for the first time, tried his skill in war against generalship of Napoleon's school. He found it cool, adroit, and daring,

[1] Diary of Foy quoted by Oman, vol. i. p. 112.

columns and battalions being used as a good fencer uses his rapier, with thrust and parry of the cleverest sort. India had showed Wellesley no generalship of this quality.

The opposing forces in this battle studied each other's bearing and methods with keen curiosity, and as though subtly conscious of the long struggle betwixt the two nations, on a great field, which was beginning. Foy tells how the French officers, from the hill crest, watched the British regiments spread out on either flank and move on their front with steady, unhalting, fate-like advance. The lines and parallelograms of red were broken, sometimes, by the rough ground, but they fell into perfect order again, and, careless of the wrath of the French guns, or the galling musketry of the French skirmishers, kept on their way. These, the Frenchmen realised, were not the uncertain, undisciplined masses, mere crowds with guns, like the Spanish armies with which they were familiar.

Rifleman Harris, who was a private in the 95th, and fought in the skirmishing line at Vimiero, gives in his narrative a vivid description of the appearance and behaviour of the French. He was standing in the ranks of the light company just before the battle began:

"As I looked about me," he says, "and just before the commencement of the battle, I thought it the most imposing sight the world could produce. Our lines glittering with

bright arms; the stern features of the men, as they stood with their eyes fixed unalterably upon the enemy; the proud colours of England floating over the heads of the different battalions; and the dark cannon on the rising ground, and all in readiness to commence the awful work of death, with a noise that would deafen the whole multitude."

Harris was with the skirmishers, and they were of course driven back as the solid French column came on, but the men of the 52nd and 43rd, standing in line, were disgusted to see their skirmishers driven in. "As we fell back, 'firing and retiring,' galling them handsomely as we did so, the men cried out (as it were with one voice) to charge. 'D——n them!' they roared, 'charge! charge!' General Fane, however, restrained their impetuosity. 'Don't be too eager, men,' he said as coolly as if we were on drill-parade in old England. 'I don't want you to advance just yet. Well done, 95th,' he called out, as he galloped up and down the line; 'well done, 43rd, 52nd, and well done all! I'll not forget, if I live, to report your conduct to-day. They shall hear of it in England, my lads.'"

Harris, again, watched the charge of the 50th, the regiment which Charles Napier afterwards commanded at Corunna.

"They dashed upon the enemy like a torrent breaking bounds, and the French, unable even to bear the sight of them, turned and fled. Methinks at this moment I can hear," he says, "the cheer of the British soldiers in the charge, and the clatter of the Frenchmen's accoutrements, as they turned in an instant, and

went off as hard as they could run for it. Their Lights, and Grenadiers, I, for the first time, particularly remarked on that day. The Grenadiers were all fine-looking young men, wearing red shoulder-knots and tremendous-looking moustaches. As they came swarming upon us, they rained a perfect shower of balls, which we returned quite as sharply."

What happened in the skirmishing line where the clash was fiercer, and the fighting was resolved into personal terms, is described with great animation. Harris could do justice to the soldier-like aspect of his enemies. "I still remember," he says, "the pleasing effect afforded by the sun's rays glancing upon their arms as they formed in order of battle to receive us." He watched the wild scene on the crest, when the leading companies of the 29th were destroyed.

"We ourselves," he writes, "caught it pretty handsomely, for there was no cover for us, and we were rather too near. The living skirmishers were lying beside heaps of their own dead, but still we held our own till the battalion regiments came up. 'Fire and retire' is a very good sound, but the Rifles were not over-fond of such notes. There were two small buildings in our front, and the French having managed to get into them, annoyed us much from that quarter. A small rise in the ground close before these houses also favoured them; and our men were being handled very severely in consequence. They became angry, and wouldn't stand it any longer. One of the skirmishers, jumping up, rushed forward, crying, 'Over, boys! Over! Over!' when instantly the whole line responded to the cry, 'Over! Over! Over!' They ran along the grass like wildfire, and dashed at the rise, fixing their sword-bayonets as they ran. The French light bobs could not stand the sight, but turned about and fled, and, getting possession of their ground, we were soon inside the buildings."

Visiting these buildings after the fight, he says: "A great many of the French skirmishers were lying dead all about. I recollect that they had long, white frockcoats on, with the eagle in front of their caps. This was one of the places from which they greatly annoyed us, and, to judge from the appearance of the wounded and dead strewn round, we had returned the compliment pretty handsomely."

Harris gives us a glimpse—almost the first glimpse—of Hill, perhaps Wellington's most trusted leader, in the confusion of the fight, when the 29th were being hard pushed. "Lord Hill," he says, "was near at hand, and I observed him come galloping up. He put himself at the head of the regiment, and restored them to order in a moment. It seemed to me that few men could have conducted the business with more coolness and quietude of manner, and in such a storm of bullets as he was exposed to. I have never forgotten him to this day."

That "coolness and quietude" in such a scene, and at such a critical moment, explains the value Wellesley put on Hill as one of his divisional generals.

When Broke began his immortal duel with the *Chesapeake* somebody proposed to him that the British ship should blossom out into flags. "The *Shannon* has always been a quiet ship," was Broke's reply. And the "quiet" form of courage—self-collected and cool—is about the deadliest quality on the battle-field, and the most valuable asset of a battle-leader.

CHAPTER V

SOULT AND THE DOURO

"Alexander might have turned from such an adventure without shame."—NAPIER.

IT was on November 25, 1808, that Moore wrote that famous memorandum to Castlereagh in which he declared that Portugal "was not defensible against a superior force," and that "its defence was not to be thought of." Less than eight weeks afterwards, on January 16, Moore himself fell at Corunna; and the memories of that brilliant but ill-fated adventure gave weight to his judgment. Great Britain had risked—and lost—her best army and, it was believed, her best general, on the field of the Peninsula, and her statesmen and her people alike found little that was tempting in that arena.

But less than eight weeks after Moore's death, on March 7, Wellesley gave a judgment exactly opposed to that of Moore. "Portugal," he wrote, "may be defended, whatever the result of the contest in Spain." Moore was a loyal and accomplished soldier, "as brave," to use Wellington's phrase, "as his own sword," but he lacked that

vision for the whole landscape of the war which Wellesley had. War is an uncertain business, but looking through the dust and confusion of Spanish affairs Wellesley discerned the essential facts. The French could not hold Spain with a British army in Portugal on their flank; they could not strike effectively at the British across an unsubdued Spain; and while a British force in Portugal kept the Spanish insurrection alive, Napoleon would be fatally handicapped on the European stage.

The final argument for maintaining the struggle in Spain was that this would save Great Britain herself becoming the field of war. Napoleon's whole policy had for its objective the overthrow of England. Trafalgar had been fought and lost; but Napoleon hoped to "conquer the sea by the land"; to shut every civilised port, that is, against British commerce, and build up a new naval combination which would enable him to strike at the enemy he most hated on her own soil. Wellesley urged that they should fight the French in Spain that they might not have to fight them in Kent or Midlothian.

In his memorandum Wellesley assessed all the factors of the problem with profound judgment. A force of 20,000 British in Portugal—he afterwards raised the number to 30,000—aided by Portuguese levies could hold their own against any French force less than 100,000 strong. And the French, he reckoned, could not gather that force against

him without such concentration of their armies as would give back nine-tenths of Spain to insurrection. The whole history of the campaigns in the Peninsula proves the truth of that judgment. The French had to abandon territory to gather armies; and the necessity for putting down the insurrection behind them made it impossible for them to concentrate their armies long enough for an effective campaign against Portugal.

Masséna in 1810 made his stroke at the British with a force not far short of the 100,000 which Wellesley held to be the maximum of strength the French could bring into the field against him; and the lines of Torres Vedras made even that great effort vain. In 1809, after Talavera, and in 1812, after Salamanca, the French, by surrendering whole provinces to the Spanish, gathered for a moment a force which drove Wellesley back to the Portuguese frontier; but the essential conditions of the problem remained exactly as Wellesley read them, and the history of the Peninsular War is the fulfilment in every detail of Wellesley's forecast.

Wellesley's claim to genius in war of the highest order might almost rest upon the paper just described—formulating the scheme for using Portugal as a safe base of operations against the French in Spain, and on a letter to Castlereagh written on September 5, 1808, in which he discusses the Spaniards themselves as one of the factors in the struggle.

He gives to Castlereagh an estimate of the value of Spanish armies; and though as yet he had never seen one drawn up in battle line, or on the march, yet the history of the six campaigns which followed sustains to the very letter Wellesley's estimate. They are capable, he says, of brilliant flashes of courage, but they lack steadiness. They are without arms, ammunition, clothing, and military equipment of every description. They may be formidable and efficient in their own country, but must not be reckoned upon out of it. In some cases they will fight the French in equal numbers, and with success; in others a French battalion, with cavalry and artillery, will disperse thousands of them. Their fighting quality, in a word, has in it a fatal strain of uncertainty.

But Wellesley was able to read, too, with clearest vision, the mind of Napoleon, and to forecast the steps he would take. The surrender of Dupont at Baylen, the evacuation of Portugal by Junot, would do more than sting Napoleon's pride; it would so wound his prestige that he was certain to make some immediate and overwhelming effort to trample out the rising in Spain, and to drive the British from Portugal. He had 400,000 veteran troops, familiar with victory, available. He would pour these through the Pyrenees on Madrid, and would then sweep across southern Spain. What could Great Britain do to arrest, or at least delay,

that red tide of war? Wellesley, though he was not a seaman, and lived a century before Captain Mahan wrote his famous book, understood the value of sea-power in war almost as clearly as that shrewd thinker himself. It would be possible, he argued, to land a British force in the north of Spain—say in the Asturias, and from that position it could strike at the flank and rear of the French advance on Madrid. And with a British force, with its base of supply at Corunna or Ferrol, threatening the right flank of the French, it was certain that the rush upon southern Spain, and upon Lisbon, could be arrested. But Napoleon would have at his command overwhelming strength, so that "for the British army," wrote Wellesley, "we must have retreat open, and that retreat must be the sea." If forced to their ships, say at Ferrol or at Corunna, they could be brought round again to the Tagus.

A stroke from the Asturias upon the flank or rear of the French advance to Madrid; a secure retreat to the sea—this, it will be seen, was almost exactly the story of Moore's campaign two months later. And the difference in military genius between Moore and Wellesley may be measured at this very point. Wellesley, months ahead and without exact knowledge of the country, framed the plan of that campaign. It was no doubt his letter to Castlereagh which induced the British Cabinet to undertake the enterprise. But Moore himself, who carried

out the plan, and usually gets the fame of it, neither invented it nor believed in it.

In the "Life of George Canning and his Times," by Stapleton, it is told how, after Moore had received his final instructions from Castlereagh, and had taken his leave, he turned back, opened the door, and said, "Remember, my Lord, I protest against the expedition, and foretell its failure." Castlereagh told this incident to the Cabinet when it met. "Good God," Canning exclaimed, "do you mean to say that you have really allowed a man entertaining such feelings towards the expedition to go and take command of it?" Perhaps, however, it heightens the conception of Moore's fine courage to know that, believing the campaign must end in disaster, he yet carried it out with such cool resolution.

But it is clear that Wellesley who planned that campaign had a sweep of genius beyond that of the man who predicted its failure; and Walter Scott's estimate of the two men is true. "Moore," he wrote to Lockhart, "was rather an excellent officer than a general of those comprehensive and daring views necessary in his dangerous situation. Had Wellesley been there," he added, "the battle of Corunna would have been fought and won at Somosierra." In this surmise, however, Scott was certainly wrong. Wellesley, with Napoleon and Ney marching to cut him off from the sea coast,

would not have stopped that cold December morning to fight Soult at Sahagun. His original plan included a retreat as its climax, and Wellesley, the most wary of leaders, would not have risked the destruction of his army for the sake of a barren victory over Soult. But in his general comparison betwixt Wellesley and Moore Scott was right. Moore lacked the daring and comprehensive views of the younger soldier. The one factor of Moore's campaigns which Wellesley did not realise was the fashion in which a British army goes to pieces in retreat. He knew that better after his own retreat from Burgos. Colborne, who was Sir John Moore's military secretary, and shared in the hardships of the famous retreat, wrote afterwards: "We can stand to be shot at as well as, or better than, most people; but we have not the military patience with which our enemies are gifted."

The British Cabinet, with all its faults of administration, did not lack courage, and on April 2, 1809, Wellesley was put in command of a new expedition to Portugal. George III., it is amusing to learn, was strongly opposed to the scheme, and he explained to Castlereagh, so late as October 3, 1809, that he "acquiesced in the appointment of so young a lieutenant-general as Lord Wellington to the command of the troops in Portugal," as he hoped the tender years of the commander would "prevent any considerable augmentation of his army." Castle-

reagh, however, undertook to raise the British forces in the Peninsula to a total of 30,000 men. Beresford was already busy organising Portuguese levies; and on April 22, Wellesley landed at Lisbon to begin the great work of his life. He had a generous sympathy for Cradock, who commanded the British force in Lisbon, and stipulated that, if he found that general engaged in active operations, he should act on his own judgment as to the necessity of superseding him. But when Wellesley arrived, the situation was clear, and on April 27 he assumed the direction of affairs.

The French forces in Spain at that moment consisted of seven army corps, under generals familiar with victory, and making, with their scattered detachments, a total force of 144,000 infantry and 29,000 cavalry. They held almost every fortress and every important strategic point in Spain. Victor with 30,000 troops was within eighteen marches of Lisbon. Soult with a force nearly as great menaced the Portuguese capital from Oporto. Wellesley, to meet such an array of armed strength, had less than 30,000 good troops —English and German—with a spray of Portuguese levies half-drilled, ill-armed, and of very uncertain fighting value. But in thirty-six hours Wellesley had formed his plan of campaign. It was to be aggressive, audacious, and, above all, swift.

Victor at Merida was the nearer enemy, Soult

at Oporto the more remote. But Victor had Cuesta on his front; it was impossible to strike at him without concerting movements with the Spanish general, and this meant delay. Soult held Oporto, a great city, with fertile provinces about it; and Wellesley determined to strike at him first.

Five days were spent in organising his forces and making provision for guarding Lisbon against a possible advance by Victor; and on April 29 Wellesley started on his great adventure. His British regiments were made up chiefly of drafts from the militia, for Moore's war-hardened veterans were still in English hospitals, and when they were fit for service they were sent—most ill-fated of soldiers—to take part in the tragedy of the Walcheren expedition. After providing for the detachments which were to watch Victor, Wellesley had for the dash on Soult only 17,000 British and 7000 Portuguese troops. Oporto, with a deep and swift river serving as a ditch, was a strong military position; and Wellesley with a force so modest in scale and much of it so uncertain in quality, was undertaking to drive from it one of the best of Napoleon's marshals with an army of veterans.

Soult had thrust out two strong detachments, one under Loison at Amarante, to the north-east of Oporto, the other under Franceschi on the Vouga, to the south-east. His position resembled a triangle, with Oporto as the apex, and Amarante and Vouga

as the tips of the enclosing sides. Wellesley's plan was to strike at Amarante with a column under Beresford, drive back Loison, and so cut off Soult's retreat northward. At the same time he made an elaborate combination for striking the other tip of the French triangle and destroying Franceschi. While these movements were in progress, a French officer, d'Argenton, made his appearance in the British lines with news of a conspiracy amongst Soult's troops. Wellesley listened to the tale, but pushed on his divisions without pause. The French, he knew, must be beaten in the field if they were to be driven out of Spain. Quarrels amongst themselves would decide nothing.

The stroke at Franceschi failed. The infantry brigades marching at night to turn his flank fell into confusion; the alert Frenchman took the alarm and fell back, covering his retreat by a succession of cavalry charges. All day there were bursts of somewhat harmless fighting betwixt the British and the retiring French, but at dusk the latter reached the Douro, and crossed it by a bridge of boats, which was blown up after they were across. However, the attack on Franceschi, though it failed, served a useful end. It fixed Soult's attention on the lower reaches of the Douro, and so gave Wellesley the opportunity of making his dash across the river upon Oporto itself.

Soult held the city with 13,000 good troops; he

had collected every boat on the river and brought it to the French side, and the stream, swift and deep and broad, seemed impassable. His baggage and convalescents had been sent off, and the French general contemplated a leisurely retreat eastward towards Salamanca. This would give him a province rich in supplies, and bring him into touch with the French forces in central Spain. Wellesley, in his sober fashion, did not imagine that he could destroy, or capture, Soult; but he hoped to drive him, with a broken army, into the wild hill country beyond Orense, and so cancel him as a factor in the war.

Wellesley pushed on with his central column, making a wide swing eastward to escape the French cavalry scouts, and on the morning of May 12, his brigades were on the southern bank of the Douro, directly opposite the city, but hidden from observation behind the height on which stands the Serra convent. Wellesley himself, with two or three of his staff, climbed to the summit of the ridge. The city with its quays, and convents, and tangle of narrow streets, lay before him in the morning sun. Through his glasses he could see, far down the stream, the French vedettes, keeping vigilant watch seawards. Infantry pickets were on guard at the opening of the streets which led down to the river; a column of infantry with many waggons was forming up outside the north-eastern gates of the city. Betwixt Wellesley's waiting battalions and the city,

held by 13,000 French veterans, rolled the swift current of the Douro, at that point 300 yards wide. What chance was there of attack? "Alexander," says Napier, "might have turned from such an adventure without shame."

But Wellesley was still studying the city through his glasses. Opposite was a large unfinished building, the bishop's seminary, the solid brick wall which surrounded it running down to the river on either side. It was unguarded. A couple of infantry battalions could hold it against anything except artillery. Its eastern face could be swept by a battery of guns from the farther bank. While Wellesley watched and brooded, Waters, his best intelligence officer, came up with a bit of good news. A barber had just crossed the river from Oporto in a little skiff. With the help of the prior of Amarante Waters secured the use of the barber's boat, and—with one or two peasants—pushed out into the stream. The boat with its tiny crew crept steadily nearer the French bank, and with each stroke of the oars Waters expected to see the flash of French muskets. No musket shot, however, broke on the quiet morning air. The bank was reached, and four half-stranded barges were got afloat and tugged laboriously to the southern bank.

This gave Wellesley the opportunity he wanted. A brief order sent Murray, with two infantry battalions, a couple of guns, and two squadrons of the

14th Light Dragoons, on the march to the ferry at Avintas some miles up the river, with orders to cross and move down the stream, so as to cover the right flank of the seminary. Another order brought three batteries of guns into the convent garden where, concealed by the vines, they were trained upon the left flank of the building. When all was ready, Wellesley gave the quiet order, "Let the men cross," and twenty-five of the Buffs, with a subaltern, clambered into the first barge and pushed off. Wellesley, with the group about him, watched the boat as it approached the French bank. Success or failure hung on its fortunes. It touched; the soldiers with their officer ran up the bank into the garden of the seminary and closed the big iron gate opening into the road beyond. The other barges were now crossing, and the little jets of red-coated soldiers followed each other up the bank, and spread themselves along the garden walls, piling up wood and earth to make a bank from which they could fire over the coping.

The barges came back again, and yet again, were crowded with soldiers, and sent across. Still there was no sign of alarm from the French side. Soult was in his bed asleep; his staff were at their dinner; his vedettes were watching the lower reaches of the river. On the third trip of the barges, Paget crossed to take command at the seminary. Presently there arose on the French bank a clamour of voices, the

roll of drums, a splutter of shots, and almost instantly—for the French are quick in war—a line of French tirailleurs, with solid infantry columns behind them, came at the quick-step down the streets leading to the seminary. At that sight, as if at a signal, both banks broke into life. The British regiments showed along the whole edge of the river, and Sherbrooke massed the Guards at the point where the boat bridge, now broken, had once stretched across it. The French opened artillery fire on the seminary, but they had not reckoned with the British guns. From across the stream eighteen pieces instantly poured a deadly flank fire on the French. The first shot, from a five and a half inch howitzer, burst over the leading French gun on the opposite bank as it was in the very act of unlimbering, and killed or wounded every man and horse attached to it. Under the stroke of a fire from eighteen guns, not 400 yards distant, the French battalions were swept back, a broken mass, into the shelter of the houses. Again and again they tried to cross that terrible belt covered by the British guns, but in vain. The seminary could only be attacked on its northern front.

By this time Paget, who was in command of the seminary, had been severely wounded, and Hill took his place. The chain of boats crossing the river never ceased for a moment. The Buffs were all across, other regiments were following. Everything

was going well for the British, except that Murray made no appearance on the farther bank. Delaborde, who had waged so gallant a fight against Wellesley at Roliça, organised a new and formidable attack on the seminary; but the Buffs, nearly 1000 strong, held the garden stubbornly. To strengthen the attack, Soult now called up the brigades keeping watch at the quays and the broken boat bridge, and this gave the exultant Portuguese their chance. Hundreds of eager citizens poured out of their houses and thronged the water's edge. In a few minutes half a hundred boats were pushing across the stream. The Guards, with the 29th, leaped into them, were quickly rowed across, and went at a run up the main street of the city, upon the flank of the French attacking the seminary. In a cross street they fell on one of Soult's reserve batteries, and promptly shot down its horses and captured the guns.

By this time the whole city was in a tumult of excitement. The rabble were taking part in the fight, if only in the way of killing the French wounded. Soult found his position desperate, and hurried his whole force out of the northern gates of the city, in retreat. The broken mass—infantry and guns tumbled together—swept northwards, and Hill, flinging open the great iron gate of the seminary, took out the Buffs in pursuit. At this moment Murray, with two battalions of the German legion and his two squadrons of the 14th, made his appear-

ance, and the whole confusion and tumult of the French retreat swept past his horses' heads. "The opportunity," says Napier, "might have tempted a blind man"; but Murray watched the turbid human tide flow past him without a sword stroke, or a musket shot. General Charles Stewart, who had been despatched by Wellesley in search of Murray, at this moment galloped up. He cast one furious glance at the escaping French, called on the nearest squadron of the 14th to follow him, and rode straight into the flying mass. Delaborde and Foy were both in the scramble trying to re-form their men. Foy was wounded, Delaborde was unhorsed and captured, but a lucky shot brought down his captor and he escaped. Some 300 French infantry were cut off and captured, but Murray watched the whole struggle with unmoved eyes, and gave no help.

Oporto was won, and Wellesley's staff sat down to eat the dinner which their beaten foes had prepared. No troops, however, exceed the French in the quickness with which they rally from a defeat, and Soult, before an hour had passed, had organised a rear-guard and was pushing on towards Amarante, meaning then to turn the heads of his column eastward and reach Salamanca. But the news met him that Beresford had driven Loison from Amarante, and that route was sealed to the French. Wellesley had outmarched his own supplies in pushing on to Oporto, and he occupied the 12th and 13th in gather-

ing his troops together, but he pushed on Murray to Chaves in order to cut the French off from that road.

Soult's position was cruel. To the south was the Douro, on both the east and the west the roads were held by the enemy; to the north stretched a barrier of savage hills, which goats could hardly cross, still less an army. But Soult was a good soldier, and an emergency like this was only a challenge to his genius. He ordered that everything which could not be carried on the backs of men or horses should be abandoned. The plunder of a whole province had to be left behind; the guns were disabled and abandoned; the very knapsacks of the infantry were turned out to see that they contained nothing except food and cartridges. The military chests, containing £50,000 in Portuguese silver, were opened, and the French infantry as they passed were allowed to help themselves. But the huge coins offered little temptation to men who were facing a series of desperate marches across the Galician hills. The chests of silver were finally attached to a powder waggon, and when the last files of the French had passed, a match was applied, and the treasure was blown, a far-spreading shower of silver coins, into space.

For three days, whipped by keen winds and blinding rain, the toiling French columns struggled across the bleak hills. On May 14, Soult got into touch with Loison at Guymarens, and his army, 20,000

strong, was again a unit. But Wellesley was pressing on in pursuit; and, more ominous still, Beresford, guessing Soult's road, was pushing, without waiting for orders, towards Chaves to cut off the French. In spite of the wild weather, and with scanty rations, Beresford's men reached Chaves on the night of the 16th—just too late; the French had slipped past them. Soult's best line of escape was by the difficult track which led to Braga, but if Wellesley knew, or guessed, he had taken that road, it was possible to bar it against him. Soult took once more to the hills, first requiring Loison's divisions to sacrifice their baggage and guns, after the fashion of his own troops. The track was wilder and the weather rougher than even in the first stages of the retreat, and at Salamonde Soult learned that the bridge at Pontenova, by which his columns must cross, had been seized by some Portuguese levies. They had torn up the wooden floor of the bridge, broken down its parapets, and built a barricade on the farther side.

The British in his rear, a broken bridge in front, impassable hills on either side; at that moment it seemed as if another Baylen—the surrender of a whole French army—was certain.

But Soult was not Dupont. He picked out Major Dulong, one of those daring soldiers, always to be found in the French army, and bade him choose a hundred grenadiers, seize the bridge, and save the

army. The night was starless; a tempest of wind and rain beat on the hill-summits and scuffled in the hill-passes. But Dulong crept through darkness and storm to the bridge, killed the sentinel, and, followed by his grenadiers, crawled along one of the great crossbeams. The rain beat on them, the river ran hoarsely beneath. Some of the grenadiers fell into the gulf and perished, but Dulong and his men still pushed on. The fate of the French army hung on those slippery beams. But the Cavada was crossed, the Portuguese were surprised and bayoneted, and the passage was won.

All night long the French sappers worked to replace the flooring of the bridge, and with morning the stream of ragged, foot-sore, famine-bitten infantry began to cross. Before half the French were over some squadrons of British cavalry came on the scene, but were held back by the French rear-guard.

At a later stage in the pursuit, an officer of Beresford's staff, Major Warre, rode ahead and gathered a company of peasants to hold the Saltador bridge against the French; and again Major Dulong, with a little band of brave spirits, broke through and found a way for the army. So close was the British pursuit that, as the last French files crossed the bridge, the guns opened fire on them from the hill slope above. At Pontenova the British pursuit ceased, but the

scene as the French troops crossed the narrow bridge, with its broken parapets, was tragical. The struggling French thrust each other over the edge till the torrent below was choked with men and horses, and while darkness fell the British guns were pouring shot and shell into the crowd.

On May 19, Soult's much-enduring columns reached Orense. He had lost nearly 3000 men in that flight across the hills. "From the 14th to the 17th," says Napier, "the marches and encounters of the two armies were like the wheeling and buffeting of vultures in the air, one commander contending for victory, the other for safety." Soult, by his energy and daring, saved the bulk of his army, but he left behind him his guns, his stores, his treasure, his sick. The sufferings of Moore's regiments on their retreat to Corunna, when Soult had been the pursuer, were amply avenged. It is true that Moore's retreat lasted twenty days, Soult's only nine; but the sufferings of Soult's men were greater on the whole than those of Moore's columns. They had a wilder country to cross; they encountered worse weather; they lost everything except their weapons and their eagles; and they had no flash of compensating victory at the end of the flight.

Wellesley's feat, on the other hand, was nothing less than splendid. It was only twenty-eight days since he had landed, and in that brief period

he had restored order and public confidence, barred Victor's advance by his dispositions, marched 200 miles through rough country, smitten as with a thunderbolt one of Napoleon's most famous marshals, and in nine days had driven him, with his army, out of a great city, and across four ranges of mountains, and left him stripped of all his equipment in the remotest corner of Spain, and so cancelled out for a time as a force. And he had done this with the loss, to his own force, as killed and wounded, of only 300 men. Not many feats of war can be named which surpass this.

CHAPTER VI

SPANISH GENERALSHIP

"My correspondence with General Cuesta has been a very curious one, and proves him to be as obstinate as any gentleman at the head of an army need be. He would not alter his position, even to insure the safety of his army, because it might be injurious to himself."—WELLESLEY.

WHEN Wellesley landed at Lisbon on April 22, 1808, Portugal, as we have seen, was threatened with invasion from two directions—by Soult, with an army of 24,000 men from Oporto, and by Victor, with an army of 30,000 from Merida; and Wellesley had to decide against which of the two he should strike. Happily for his fame, and for the whole fortunes of England, he chose Soult. The problem in that adventure was simple. Wellesley could frame his own strategy; he had to put in battle-line practically none but his own troops. But when he moved against Victor, he lost the power of independent action. He had to put his regiments in battle-line with Spanish infantry, to frame a plan of campaign which would satisfy a Spanish general, and to trust for the subsistence of his army to the good faith of Spanish juntas. As a result his army

was brought nearer to absolute destruction than at any other period during the war. If Talavera, and not the passage of the Douro, had been the first incident in Wellesley's operations, it may be taken for certain there would have been no Peninsular War—with what results on the general course of history it is not easy to guess.

The movement against Soult had succeeded brilliantly, and Wellesley wasted no time. The moment his pursuit of Soult ceased, the heads of his columns were swung round to the south, and they began their march back to the Tagus. His brigades came by different roads, their objective being Abrantes, and by June 11 most of them had reached that point. Wellesley had not quite 20,000 men available for operations against Victor, who had 25,000 men under his immediate command, with the possibility of being greatly strengthened from Madrid the moment it was known the British were advancing. Napier is angrily eloquent on the failure of the British Government at this stage to strengthen Wellesley's force.

"At the moment," he says, "when Wellesley was waiting impatiently on the Tagus for the scanty reinforcements promised him, a British army of 12,000 men was preparing to invade Italy, while 40,000 of the finest troops the nation could boast of, and a fleet with power to overthrow all the other navies of the world combined, were preparing for the Walcheren expedition. The marine and land forces combined numbered more than 80,000 men, and those of the bravest. These were being sent to perish in the pestilent marshes of Walcheren while Wellesley was denied adequate reinforcements."

But this is hardly a just statement of the situation. Wellesley himself was no worshipper of big armies. His practical sense taught him that the bigger the army, the greater was the difficulty of feeding it. He wrote to Castlereagh on August 25—after Talavera, that is, was fought: "If we had had 60,000 men instead of 20,000, in all probability we should not have got to Talavera to fight the battle for want of means and provisions."

At this stage Wellesley was certainly not "waiting impatiently" for reinforcements. He had a quite different challenge to his patience. While his columns were tramping on their way to Abrantes, he was trying to agree upon a plan of campaign with Cuesta, and he found the task well-nigh impossible.

There could not well be a more complete contrast than that presented by the figures and characters of the two generals who, at this moment, were required to act together. Cuesta was old, obese, loitering, stubborn; so incapable of active movement that he had not only to be lifted on his horse by his attendants, but held there on either side by his aides-de-camp. His temper was suspicious and fierce. He might almost be described as a mere bundle of furious passions—a passion of hate against the French, a passion of jealousy against Wellesley, a passion of suspicion against not only the junta, but against almost every other general that held its commission. "He did not want courage," is Wellesley's summary

of him, "nor sense either, but was an obstinate old man and had no military genius."

Wellesley, on the other hand, lean, hardy, active, with his ice-cold common-sense, his economy of time, his habit of swift decision, his inflexible rule of doing the work of each day within the day, his faculty for silence, his stern sense of discipline, was, both in body and intellect, the very antithesis of the Spanish general. The task of agreeing on a common plan of operation with such an ally might well have taxed to the breaking point even his iron patience.

By July 11, however, a plan was agreed upon. Wellesley was to march to Plasencia and join Cuesta, who had a force of 36,000 troops, supposed to be efficient, under his flag. Venegas, with an army of 23,000, was at the same time to threaten Madrid from the south, so as to prevent the despatch of reinforcements to Victor. These two armies, added to that of Wellesley, made a combined force of 80,000 men; but they were scattered over a wide area and not under the control of a single will. Victor had 25,000 men, the French immediately protecting Madrid did not exceed 50,000, so that the opposing forces were roughly equal, and the movement of Venegas on Madrid was intended to leave Victor isolated, to be crushed by the combined attack of Wellesley and Cuesta.

This strategy was simple and plausible, but the facts were in hopeless quarrel with it. Wellesley

was risking the fate of his army and the fortunes of the campaign on a cluster of assumptions, most of which were entirely false. He could not foresee that the junta, who promised abundant supplies to his army, would leave it to starve; that Cuesta's great army, when put into the fighting line with the British, would prove almost absolutely worthless for fighting purposes. Least of all could he foresee that Venegas would have secret orders from the junta *not* to advance on Madrid, so that the French forces guarding that city would march to reinforce Victor.

Wellesley himself miscalculated seriously at another point. He had left Soult's shattered army without guns, equipment, or transport in the wilds of Galicia, and believed that it might be practically disregarded. In this he was mistaken. Napoleon's genius had suddenly created a new situation. He realised that the British army was the sole obstacle to the triumph of his policy in Spain, and he despatched instructions uniting the 2nd, 5th, and 6th corps, placing them under the command of Soult, and directing him to abandon every other task and join in the business of beating, hunting down, and casting into the sea the British army. On June 30 Soult, then at Zamora, received a letter from Napoleon, written at Ratisbon. "Wellesley," the letter ran, "will probably advance by the Tagus against Madrid. In that case, pass the mountains, fall on his flank and rear, and crush him." Napoleon,

it will be seen, guessed Wellesley's route, and framed a plan for his destruction, with a divination almost wizard-like in its completeness. As a result of that order at the moment Wellesley was moving from Abrantes to join Cuesta, Soult, with a force of 50,000 men, was preparing to strike at his communications.

"None but great men and fools," says Napier, "are free from indecision in war; the first because they see clearly, the last because they see nothing." Wellesley was a great soldier; but he certainly did not see the landscape of the war clearly at this stage. He was moving amongst unknown perils. The one happy circumstance was that the French generals were in equal ignorance. On July 9, when the British army had entered Plasencia, and was only 125 miles from Madrid, King Joseph wrote to his brother that the British "had not yet made any pronounced movement. It was uncertain whether they would invade Galicia or remain at Lisbon." Wellesley, on his part, wrote to Castlereagh that "there were 125,000 French in the Peninsula, and out of these only 70,000" were opposed to him. At that moment there were 253,000 French in Spain; and not 70,000 but 170,000 good troops—taking Napier's figures—were preparing to fall upon him. Wellesley, in a word, to quote Napier, "was about to engage himself in the narrow valley of the Tagus, with 20,000 British and 40,000 Spanish troops, when 50,000 French were waiting for him at the farther

end, and 50,000 others were hanging on his flank and rear. The fate of the Peninsula hung by a thread which could not bear the weight for twenty-four hours."

Wellesley waited at Abrantes till June 27. His regiments were almost worn out with the hard marches and the rough weather of their pursuit of Soult; their pay was in arrears; supplies of shoes and clothing came in slowly; the promised reinforcements were delayed. No wonder the discipline of the army was shaken. Wellesley, always disposed to speak in severe terms of his own men, was at this moment in a bitter mood. "They are," he wrote to Castlereagh, "a rabble who cannot bear success any more than Sir John Moore's army could bear failure."

On June 28, Wellesley's columns were on the march. He moved warily. Beresford kept guard at the pass of Perales; Cuesta had made himself responsible for the pass at Banos, so that Wellesley believed his flank to be secure. What he did not know was that Banos was held by a mere handful of Spanish infantry, with only twenty rounds of ammunition a man, while Soult, with two army corps, was preparing to strike at his communications.

On July 10, the British columns were at Plasencia, Cuesta crossing the Tagus at Almarez, while Victor fell back to Talavera. Wellesley's headquarters were sixty miles, Cuesta's only forty miles, distant from

him. Wellesley had crossed the Spanish frontier with very inadequate means of transport, and practically no magazines. He trusted to Spanish promises, and already these had been found to be worthless. Victor, who acted on Napoleon's principle of making war support war, had already in the same district been brought to the verge of starvation. He wrote to King Joseph on June 25: "The 1st Corps is on the eve of dissolution, the men are dropping down from mere starvation. I have nothing, absolutely nothing, to give them, and I am forced to fall back on Talavera, where there are no more resources than here."

Wellesley was now moving across the same wasted plains. He could not plunder after the French fashion; he had to trust to Spanish good-will and the purchasing power of money; and both failed him. He had made contracts with local alcaldes for 250,000 rations of forage and provision, but none came in. His regiments already were on half allowance, the army was in danger of perishing from actual starvation, and Wellesley declared he would withdraw from Spain altogether unless Spanish promises were kept.

The difficulty of arranging with Cuesta the details of an attack on Victor was great. The Spanish general rejected scheme after scheme. Wellesley wrote to Castlereagh on June 17: "He is now refusing to accept a plan which he himself suggested in one of

his earlier letters, merely because that plan had been taken up and advocated by his ally." "The obstinacy of this old gentleman," he wrote again to Frere, "is throwing out of our hands the finest game that any army has ever had."

On July 10, Wellesley rode over to the Spanish camp at Almarez to bring matters to a decision. He reached the Spanish lines after dark, and was welcomed by the thunder of guns and a vast array of torches.

"The torches," says Lord Londonderry in his "History of the Peninsular War," "held aloft at moderate intervals, threw a red and wavering light over the whole scene, while the grim and swarthy visages of the soldiers, their bright arms and dark uniforms, appeared peculiarly picturesque, as often as the flashes fell upon them. Cuesta himself, an old man, preceded us, not so much sitting upon his horse as held upon it by two pages, at the imminent risk of being overthrown whenever a cannon was discharged, or a torch flamed out with peculiar brightness. His physical debility was so observable as clearly to mark his unfitness for the situation which he held."

Of the rank and file, Londonderry says:

"It would not have been easy to find a stouter or more hardy looking body of soldiers, but it was easy to see from the attitude in which they stood and the manner in which they handled their arms that little or no discipline prevailed among them. They were little better than bold peasantry, armed partially like soldiers, but completely ignorant of a soldier's duty."

The interview that followed lasted four hours. Cuesta could speak French but would not, from a sullen and childish hate of everything "French"; Wellesley could not adequately express himself in

Spanish, and the Spanish chief of staff, O'Donoju, acted as interpreter. With great fluency he would interpret Wellesley's proposals to Cuesta, and the fat, gloomy old man would simply open his mouth to growl out a curt and sudden negative. It was finally agreed that the two armies should move forward in touch with each other; on reaching Talavera they would cross the Alberche, and attack Victor. They did not guess that Venegas had let Sebastiani slip from his front and that the Frenchman was marching at speed to join Victor. Still less did they imagine that, when Venegas discovered this, he would refuse to make that thrust at Madrid which was the vital feature of the allied plan of campaign.

Wellesley, however, threatened with destruction by mere famine, had warned both Cuesta and the English Minister that he would not proceed beyond the Alberche unless his wants were supplied.

On July 18, the two armies joined at Oropesa, nineteen miles from Talavera. On the 19th they were on the march for that place, the Spaniards holding the right and moving along the high road, the British marching on their left, crossing the foot of the hills. At noon the French rear-guard—2000 cavalry under Latour-Maubourg—brought the Spanish columns to a stand. Cuesta pushed forward 15,000 infantry to support his cavalry, but still the daring Frenchman held them in check, till some

British cavalry made their appearance on the French flank. "We found them (the Spanish)," writes Lord Munster, "utterly incapable of coping with the enemy's tirailleurs, who would drive them almost into a circle. No men could have more carefully avoided coming to close quarters than did the Spanish this day." The British, it is clear, had already begun to suspect the fighting powers of their allies.

On July 23, Victor was in their front. The Alberche was fordable in many places, the allies were double in number to the French, and Wellesley was eager to fight. "But when the details were to be arranged," says Napier, "Cuesta went to bed." He sent word at midnight, however, that he accepted the plan of operations, and the British, as agreed, were under arms at three o'clock in the morning, but the Spanish columns failed to arrive, and after long waiting, Wellesley rode in search of his ally. He had driven to the outposts in a coach drawn by nine mules, and Wellesley found him sitting on a pile of cushions taken out of his carriage, the picture of mental and physical inability. It was clear the battle must be put off, but Wellesley urged an attack in the afternoon. Cuesta, however, was obstinate. There was to be no fighting till the next day. "If he had fought when I wanted him at Talavera," Wellesley said long afterwards, "I have no hesitation in saying it would have been as great

a battle as Waterloo, and would have cleared Spain of the French for that time."[1]

In the afternoon Victor seemed to be moving, and Cuesta came to his outposts to see for himself. He was hoisted on to his horse by two grenadiers, while an aide-de-camp stood on the other side to conduct his right leg into the stirrup; then, hunched up on his saddle, he rode down to the river, stared at the enemy's lines, and once more refused to attack till next morning. At daybreak Victor was gone. He had seen the red-coated regiments on the slopes of the hills, and discovered that he was threatened by two armies, not by one.

Cuesta was now eager to move on Talavera, but Wellesley declared that without food he would not set his regiments on the march. Cuesta protested that the French were in flight, and he would follow them. "In that case," said Wellesley dryly, "he will get himself into a scrape." The Spanish advance guard pushed on till it suddenly found itself in front, not merely of Victor's force, but of Sebastiani's divisions, and the reserves of King Joseph from Madrid—some 50,000 good troops in all. Cuesta's advance guard was pushed roughly back, and panic might have spread through his whole force but for the spirit shown by Albuquerque, who, with his cavalry division, 3000 strong, checked the French, while Cuesta's

[1] Stanhope, 47.

infantry in great confusion fell back towards the Alberche. Sherbrooke with the Guards thrust himself, at this point, across the path of the French, and secured some respite to the disordered Spaniards.

Cuesta halted his columns on the bank of the Alberche, and Wellesley urged him to cross the stream, but the old general was furious, and more obstinate than ever. "He would fight where he stood," he declared. The French cavalry were coming up; Wellesley, determined not to risk Sherbrooke's regiments, was preparing to withdraw them, and at last Cuesta consented to cross the stream. But he boasted to his staff that he "had first made the Englishman go down on his knees" before he would yield to him.

CHAPTER VII

TALAVERA

"Throughout the day his (Wellesley's) bearing was that of a general upon whose vigilance and intrepidity the fate of fifty thousand men depended."—NAPIER.

A BATTLE was now inevitable, and Wellesley, with his matchless eye for "country," had already chosen his position. He was himself with Mackenzie's division and the light cavalry, which formed the British rear-guard, when it was caught by the alert veterans of the French advance. Wellesley had just mounted the roof of a ruined house from which he could get a view of the country. The smoke from some burning huts was driven by the wind over the strip of plain, thick with scrub, which stretched to the river, and, under cover of the smoke, the French piquets crossed the stream, crept undetected through the scrub, surprised the British outposts, and with a fierce rush drove them in. Wellesley himself was almost caught. He told Greville long afterwards that "if he had not been young and active, he must have been taken, for he had to leap from

the wall of the ruined house on which he stood." It happened that the two English battalions attacked were young soldiers, and the suddenness of the French onfall threw them into confusion, but the 45th, "a stubborn old regiment," and some companies of the 60th Rifles, stood firm, and the division fell back unbroken; but it had lost some 400 men.

Wellesley's battle plan at Talavera was simple. The front of the allies formed a line at right angles with the Tagus; the Spaniards held the town itself, and the ground, thick with trees and enclosures, for a mile beyond it, their left resting on a mound, upon which a battery of guns was placed. Cuesta thus, with 32,000 men, held a front of only a mile, covered by a convent, as well as by ditches and breastworks, and his share of the line was practically safe from attack.

The British held the line for a mile beyond the Spanish left. Campbell's division, Sherbrooke with the Guards, and the King's German Legion, formed the centre of the line. It was absolutely without cover, and open to both gun fire and infantry attack. Mackenzie's battalions with Anson's and Fane's cavalry were in support of Sherbrooke; Donkin's brigade formed a second line to the King's German Legion. Hill's division held the left of Wellesley's battle-line, with a rough hill, the Cerro de Medellin, at its extremity,

Battle of
TALAVERA
at the period of the final attack.
28th. July 1809.
Cav. Inf.
English
French
Spanish
FRENCH ARMY 1 P.M. JULY 27TH.
Heights of Salinas
Alberche R.
SKIRMISH
3 P.M. JULY 27TH
Casa Salinas
KING'S RESERVE
DRAGOONS
River Tagus
LAPISSE
4TH. CORPS
MILHAUD
DRAGOONS
RUFFIN
VILLATTE
48TH.
GUARDS
POLES
DONN
GERMAN
LEG.
GUARDS
CAMPBELL
MCKENZIE
23RD
PASSEGOUR
PARC &
HOSPITALS
1ST
HUSSARS
Talavera
ALBUQUERQUE
Hollow and the Wood
To Oropesa
To Arzobispo
Walker & Boutallier

and the Portina, a shallow stream, as a sort of ditch in its front. This hill was the vital feature of the British defence. If seized by the enemy, their whole line was open to its fire; and, by one of those curious blunders, in which all battles abound, the hill at first was very lightly held. Hill's two brigades had halted half a mile behind it. There were piquets, it is true, on the crest of the hill, and two battalions of the King's German Legion on its slopes, but its summit was almost naked.

Victor was quick of eye, and familiar with the ground. He knew the tactical value of the hill, and, seeing it weakly held, made a daring and sudden leap upon it. Ruffin's division ran forward with Villatte's in support, while Lapisse's battalions fell upon the Germans. It was nine o'clock when Ruffin took forward his men at the double. The night was dark, and half-way up the slope the attacking force stumbled across Low's brigade of the German Legion. The men were lying down in line, with no sufficient piquets thrown out in front, and the active French ran in upon the Germans, swept over them, and destroyed them as a military body almost at a breath. Ruffin's leading battalion reached the crest with hardly any opposition.

Hill, who had halted with his brigades, saw the flash of musketry fire on the summit, and heard the tumult of volleys and shouts. "Not having an

idea," he wrote afterwards, "that the enemy was so near, I said to myself that it was the old Buffs as usual making some blunder." He rode at speed up the hill, and with his brigade-major, Fordyce, pushed into the crowd at its top, calling loudly on the men to cease firing. He found himself in a crowd of French infantry! His brigade-major was shot dead, an infantryman seized Hill's reins, but he spurred his horse free, broke through the French, and breathless, with his horse wounded, reached Stewart's brigade. Hill knew the peril of the situation, and he brought forward Stewart's men at the double. The 29th followed, and the French were driven, with hard fighting, and at the point of the bayonet, from the crest of the hill.

Lapisse meanwhile was coming up in support, some of Ruffin's broken regiments re-formed on him, and the fighting in the darkness for a time was both furious and close. To those who watched from a distance the black mass of the hill, shapeless in the darkness, the red darting points of opposing musketry volleys seemed almost to touch. But the stubborn British outwore and outfought the gallant Frenchmen, and the hill remained in their possession, but on its slopes lay 1800 dead and wounded men. That night fight on the hill set the keynote of the stormy music of Talavera.

A little earlier in the same afternoon some French light horse had begun to "feel" the front of the

Spaniards hidden in the olive groves, and some infantry batteries joined in the cannonade which the horse artillery had already begun. The British guns from the centre were answering the French fire when, suddenly, from almost the entire front of the line held by the Spaniards there broke out a tremendous salvo of musketry, though there was no enemy within musket shot distance. A tumult of voices swept along the Spanish line, and some 10,000 infantry set off in simultaneous flight. "2000 of them," Wellesley wrote to Castlereagh, "ran off not a hundred yards from where I was standing who were neither attacked, not threatened with an attack, and who were only frightened by the noise of their own fire. They left their arms and accoutrements on the ground, their officers went with them." "I have seen many curious sights in my life," said Wellesley long afterwards, "but that is the only time I saw 10,000 men running a race together."

There is a strange infection in panic. It seemed to seize at a breath, and like a madness, two-thirds of the Spanish army. Artillery men abandoned their guns, the infantry threw away their arms; whole regiments of cavalry were suddenly resolved into galloping mobs. "The Spanish adjutant-general," says Napier, "was foremost in flight." The rush of the crowd swept away everything in its rear, including English commissary clerks, paymasters, and sutlers. The fugitives, however, found

time as they ran to plunder the baggage of the British army. "It is not to be concealed," says Napier, "that some English officers disgraced their uniform on this occasion." Some of the fugitives did not halt till they got to Oropesa, twenty miles distant, and Cuesta sent his cavalry to head the fugitives in vain.

But the astonished French, who watched the flight, had no troops to take advantage of the gap in Wellesley's front. Part of the Spanish line remained firm, Wellesley brought up some cavalry, and by degrees the panic died away. Cuesta spent the night in chasing back his scattered infantry, but when morning dawned, there were still 6000 Spaniards missing. Next day the furious Spanish general proposed to punish the defaulting regiments by shooting every tenth man in their ranks, and was actually carrying out this plan when Wellesley interposed and stopped it.

The much contested hill on the British left was now strongly held by the brigades of Stewart and Hill and by battalions of the King's German Legion; and their piquets were thrust down the slope towards the French so far that all night they could hear the call of the French sentries answering the challenge of the rounds. Again and again the darkness of the night was broken by sudden jets of red musketry-fire as the outposts of the two armies jostled against each other. From the

centre of the British position, where the Guards lay, a dreadful roar of musketry broke out at midnight. A false alarm had been given, and the Guards fired volley after volley through the darkness at some imaginary French column, killing or wounding many of their own piquets. An hour later, the portion of the line held by the Spaniards flashed for many minutes continuously with musketry fire.

On the French side the darkness for hours was pricked with long lines of moving torches. These eddied to and fro opposite the hill where Hill's brigades kept stern watch, and the rattle of gun carriages and wheels, the sharp crack of whips, could be heard. Victor was marking out the position of his batteries, and getting his guns into place ready for a new attempt at dawn, to carry the blood-stained hill, on which his men had already suffered defeat. Again and again through the darkness the cry "Stand to your arms!" ran, a chain of stern, calling voices, along the whole British front. It was a troubled night, and brought a troubled dawn.

As the light grew slowly in the east, the British sentinels saw that the French lines were broken, along the whole of their front, into square masses, like the checkers on a draught-board. King Joseph meant business early, and his regiments stood in battalion columns, ready for the attack. There

were guns in the intervals betwixt the chequers, and a spray of skirmishers spread in front of each black square. Behind were long lines of horsemen. This threatening landscape of horse and foot and guns ceased at the point where the Spaniards held the line. It was too strong for attack; the whole strength of the French was to be flung on the part where the British stood; and there were 40,000 French against 20,000 red-coats. The biggest square of French troops—black and menacing—was opposite the hill on the extreme British left, the key of the whole position, where Hill kept guard.

Presently the French guns broke into thunder; the damp morning air forbade the smoke to rise, and it hung like a thick veil on the lower slopes of the hill, so that Ruffin's quick-footed battalions began their charge unseen by the British. Hill's infantry on the crest knew the attack was coming only when they saw their own skirmishers break out of the smoke as they fell back. They were in a stubborn mood and fell back slowly, firing venomously as they retired. Hill was anxious to get his front clear, and his bugles called shrilly and often to bring his skirmishers in, but they were not to be hurried. "It was," says Oman, "one of the only two occasions on which Hill was known to swear." "D—— their filing," he cried, "let them come in anyhow."

Hill's front at last was clear, and the French could be seen coming on through the smoke. Their artillery was scourging Hill's lines cruelly, and he made his men lie down till the French were within a hundred yards. Then he called upon his six battalions to stand up on their feet and advance. He was meeting 5000 men with little over 3500. But the French were in column, the British in one far-stretching line, and the volleys from so wide a front, sudden and sharp as on a field day, literally smashed the head of Ruffin's attack. His columns halted and broke into an angry musketry fire. Hill's regiments moved quickly forward, but the broken ground disordered them, and at points the fighting was in groups and hand to hand. Sherbrooke, who was watching the struggle, took a battalion of the King's German Legion out of his left brigade, and ran in with it upon the flank and rear of the nearest French regiment. At the same moment Stewart on the other flank gave his brigade the order to charge with the bayonet. Nothing could resist that double front of threatening steel points. Ruffin's battalions lost all order and were swept down to the foot of the hill. In forty minutes' fighting they had lost 1300 killed and wounded.

The French guns barked against the British on the hill for a while, and then the fire died down, while the French generals held a consultation.

Their stroke at the key of the British position had failed again, and the three leaders—King Joseph, Marshal Jourdan, and Victor—held angry dispute as to the next step. While their generals wrangled, the French regiments could be seen, with piled arms, cooking their breakfast, and from the hill, strewn with wounded and dying, many of the British came down to the stream at its foot. The thirsty French mingled with them there, and the soldiers who, half-an-hour before had been wrestling together in one of the bloodiest fights in the whole war, now chatted and laughed together, while the piquets gathered up the wounded on both sides.

The wisest head amongst the French generals was that of Jourdan; he knew that Soult was moving to strike at Wellesley's communications: the moment these were assailed Wellesley must fall back, and his counsel was to wait till, by the appearance of Soult on his rear, Wellesley was compelled to retreat. Victor, however, in a passion at his repeated failure on the hill, pressed for another attack, simultaneously with an assault on the centre of the British line. If that combination failed, he said, "it would be time to give up war."

It was finally agreed that Sebastiani's corps of 14,000 men should attack the British centre held by the Guards, while Victor, with 16,000 men,

tried to carry the hill and turn Wellesley's flank.

From the crest of the threatened hill, Wellesley watched with steady eyes the preparations of the French for a new assault. He quickly guessed on what points in his line this new tempest of war would break. The cavalry brigades of Fane and Anson, with some guns, were ordered up to guard the flank of the threatened hill; from Cuesta a battery of 12-pounders — heavier guns than any possessed by the British—was borrowed and used to strengthen the centre of the British line.

At two o'clock the French artillery broke into fire along their whole front, and eighty guns were playing upon the British, while only thirty-six guns could reply. In some places the guns were only 600 yards distant from the sorely-tried regiments on which they were firing. Grattan says that the 88th, which did not fire a single musket-shot, yet lost 136 in killed and wounded from the French artillery. The new French attack began with the advance of Leval's division, 4500 strong. It charged with what Napier calls "infinite fury" upon Campbell's position. The French came on with such vehemence, and were so broken in order by their rush over the rough ground, that they seemed to the steady British lines like a confused tumult of skirmishers. Campbell's regiments stood sternly silent till the French were almost at the

touch; then they broke into a fierce shout. Their muskets fell to the present, and a sustained volley scorched the front and flanks of Leval's shaken columns. It was plainly the moment for a charge. Colonel Myers, of the 7th, seized the King's colour of his regiment, and ran out in front, calling "Come on, Fusileers!" Nothing could withstand that charge. Leval's battalions were broken and driven back in rout over the French batteries in their rear; and when Campbell's regiments, breathless but triumphant, re-formed and fell back to their line, they brought ten captured French guns with them. In that brief and furious contest the French lost nearly 700 men.

By this time Sebastiani was moving on the part of the line held by the Guards. Sherbrooke had eight battalions; the French attack consisted of twenty-four battalions, and they came on in more steady and formidable order than Leval's men had shown in their rush on Campbell. The shallow brook in their front was crossed; the level ground was clear before them; they had only to run in on the thin red line of the Guards, which seemed too slender to stop their rush. Sherbrooke had issued strict orders that his men were not to fire till the enemy were within fifty yards; they were then to give a single volley and charge.

The British line was pricked and torn with

musketry-fire, but it stood grimly silent till the French were within the prescribed fifty yards. Then a sudden order, repeated in high-pitched answering voices, ran down the line, and one rending and shattering volley from the whole long front smote, and seemed to destroy as with a blast of flame, the heads of the French battalions. Some of Sebastiani's regiments lost a third of their numbers under that dreadful volley. Then the Guards charged, and before the rush of that close-linked disciplined line, dreadful with shining points of steel, the French battalions, with all order lost, were swept back across the brook to the point at which they had started on their charge, and beyond it.

The Guards were by this time out of hand with the passion of their charge. Cameron, a cool Scotchman, had halted his brigade, but the other regiments were pressing furiously on, and this made a gap in the British line. The French reserves were moving quickly forward; their batteries smote the flank of Sherbrooke's disordered regiments, and some squadrons of French dragoons rode in upon their right flank. The Guards were checked; they came back, fighting as they retreated, but they were now in mere tangled groups, and they swept Cameron's men away in their retreat. More than 600 out of Sherbrooke's 2000 men had fallen; the gap torn in the British front seemed wide and deep, and the French, coming on with clamour of shrill and

exultant voices, and sharp musketry volleys, threatened to wreck Wellesley's centre.

Mackenzie, a good soldier, brought up his brigade quickly to cover part of the gap, and the broken Guards swept through their intervals and rallied behind them. "They were in a mood of good humour and determination," says Lord Munster, who saw them as they swept by, "even after such dreadful losses"; they re-formed coolly behind Mackenzie's regiment, and broke into a loud "Hurrah" as they commenced to take fresh ground. Sebastiani, a fine soldier, attacked the new line with great fury, before its formation was complete; Mackenzie himself fell, and out of his brigade of 2000, every third man was killed or wounded. But nothing could shake his obstinate regiments, and Sebastiani's division at last fell back. He had lost all his four colonels, with more than eighty other officers, and over 2000 rank and file.

It was a little farther to the left, however, that the peril to the British was greatest. Cameron's brigade and the two brigades of the King's German Legion had suffered dreadful losses: in one of the German brigades every second man had been killed or wounded. Wellesley, however, had watched the fight, and he brought the 48th, counting 700 bayonets, at speed from the southern slope of the hill held by Stewart's brigade, to the gap in the British centre, just as the broken King's German Legion and

Cameron's brigade came tumbling back. Wheeling back by companies, the 48th let the broken Guards pass, then they swung swiftly into line again and checked the triumphant French with deadly volleys. The French, once brought to a standstill, fell into disorder; the guns from a neighbouring battery tore their flank; Lapisse himself was killed, and of his division, 7000 strong, some 1800 men were down. The British had lost even more in proportion to their numbers; but they doggedly held their ground through the long tempest of fire beating on them, and won after losing more than one-third of their numbers. "There was," says Professor Oman, "no such victory as this during the whole war, save Albuera."

In the meanwhile Victor was pushing forward his divisions again to attack the hill on the British left; the movement seemed to offer the chance of a cavalry attack, and Wellesley ordered Anson's brigade of light dragoons to charge. Colonel Elley led the 23rd Light Dragoons; beside them rode the 1st German Hussars. The men were eager for the fight; the ground was level, the French battalions were falling hurriedly into squares to meet the lines of galloping horsemen. But in the very rapture of the charge, and when within 150 yards of the French squares, Elley, riding two lengths ahead of his regiment, suddenly saw across his path a ravine fifteen feet broad and ten feet deep. He was splendidly

mounted, and cleared the great ditch with a leap. Then he swung his horse round and threw up his hand to stop his charging squadrons. But the front line was already on the edge of the ravine. Some cleared it with a desperate leap, some scrambled over at various points, but many tumbled into it, and the next line coming up at the gallop was piled over them. The Germans struck the fatal ravine at a point where it was even broader, though shallower, than in front of the 23rd. According to a familiar story, the colonel, Arentschild, drew rein on the edge of the chasm crying, "I will not kill my young mans," and so saved his regiment. Napier, who, of course, was familiar with the gossip of the camps, tells this story; but Professor Oman, a later historian, and who has the advantage of fuller evidence, says this statement is "entirely disproved."

The Germans crossed the ravine, though with severe loss; the troopers who had scrambled over the ravine—the men of the 23rd and the Germans—fell into rough order and rode at the French squares. The Germans were repulsed, but suffered small loss, and succeeded in riding back. The two left squadrons of the 23rd charged a French square, failed in their charge, and struggled back across the ravine to the British lines. Elley and the two right squadrons rode furiously past the infantry squares, charged a brigade of French chasseurs, broke through them, and dashed at a second line of cavalry. The

regiment through which they had broken rallied, swung round, and fell upon their rear. The men of the 23rd, in the midst of an enemy five times as numerous as themselves, were practically annihilated, but Elley with seven or eight officers and troopers—more lucky than their comrades, and, perhaps, better mounted—broke through and escaped. Out of 450 men of the 23rd who rode in that charge, 207 were killed, wounded, or missing.

At this point the battle practically came to an end. The direct attack on the great hill was not to be made until the British centre had been shaken; but the French attack on that point had failed, and though Victor's guns for hours searched the slopes, and the crest of the hill, with their fire, inflicting cruel loss on the British regiments holding the position, yet no infantry attack was made upon it, and the charge of Anson's cavalry brigade had wrecked the attempt to turn its flank.

Victor, a soldier of hot temper, was eager for new plans of attack, although every fourth man in his battalions had been hit and the stubborn British had not yielded an inch of ground. But Jourdan had the caution that age teaches; King Joseph was shocked with the slaughter in his divisions; and, finally, it was resolved to fall back to the position held on the 27th.

The battle was won, and 16,000 British infantry had defeated the utmost efforts of an army of

26,000 French veterans. Those figures, indeed, hardly do justice to Wellesley's soldiers. Sherbrooke's division, numbering 8000 bayonets, had met and defeated the charge of the divisions of Lapisse and of Sebastiani, numbering over 15,000; but for their victory the British paid a dear price. Their loss, in killed and wounded, amounted to 5365; that of the French was still heavier, and reached 7268. Of the Spanish loss no returns were published. It consisted chiefly of the "missing"—the heroes who ran away at the beginning of the fight—terrified with the sound of their own muskets, and never returned.

The fate of great battles sometimes hangs on very small events. Talavera may be said, in one sense, to have depended on a jump. If Ruffin's tirailleurs had been a little quicker, or Wellesley a little less active, he would have been captured before the battle began, and it is easy to imagine what would have been the fate of the allied forces with Wellesley gone and Cuesta left in command. But Wellesley escaped by jumping from the wall of the Casa de Salines, and whether Talavera should be a defeat or a victory may be said to have hung on that leap.

When 10,000 Spaniards, again, suddenly took to their heels and ran, it plainly only needed another jostle of alarm to send the other 20,000 Spaniards after them. If the French had only happened to have a battery of guns, or a couple of regiments of

cavalry at hand, that additional thrill of alarm might easily have been communicated to the rest of Cuesta's army, and Wellesley would have been left with a broken battle-line, and half his army, to meet the onfall of double his number. Or if, again, the French tirailleur, who got his hands on Hill's reins when that astonished general found himself in the middle of the crowded French infantry on the Cerro de Medellin, had held them, and Hill had been shot or made a prisoner, the key of the British position would have been lost, and with it the battle. Three times, in a word, before the battle began, the French missed an overwhelming victory, and the British escaped irremediable disaster, by the most trivial of accidents; on such small events, in war, do great issues turn.

CHAPTER VIII

A CHANGED POLICY

"To great minds, great misfortunes are seldom unmixed evils. Out of the nettle calamity they pluck the flower wisdom."—HAMLEY.

WHEN night fell at Talavera, the battlefield was strewn thick with the dead and dying. The plain and the hill slopes over which, for so many hours, two armies had wrestled, were thick with dry grass and shrubs, and, just as dusk was gathering, a fire broke out, and over one-third of the field of battle, strewn with the wounded and the dead, the flames ran with fury, and many of the wounded perished.

When day broke on the 29th, the French had fallen back across the Alberche, and, a little later in the morning, Craufurd, with the Light Division—the 43rd, 52nd, and 95th—reached the field. Craufurd heard, at Naval Moral, forty-three miles distant, of the approaching battle. He left his baggage and a few weakly men behind, and in twenty-two hours his force marched forty-three—Napier says sixty-two—miles. Each man carried fifty pounds weight

on his back. As they marched, they could hear the cannon growing ever louder beyond the hills; they met, in streams, Spanish fugitives—and some fugitives who were not Spanish—from the battlefield, with tales of the utter destruction of the British army; but Craufurd sternly pressed on, only to reach the field when the long fight was over. According to Maxwell, the Light Division used the quick-step invented by Sir John Moore, three paces walking, alternating with three paces running.

That footsore, but compact and hardy little force of infantry was a welcome addition to Wellesley's strength, and they were at once sent to the front, to take charge of the outposts.

Wellesley spent three days collecting his wounded, and striving, with imperfect success, to gather supplies for his starving regiments, a business in which he found scanty help from the Spanish; then he prepared to follow Victor. "We shall certainly move towards Madrid," he wrote to Beresford, on July 29, "if not interrupted by some accident on our flanks." That sentence proves that, by this time, some hint of the war-cloud gathering on his flank had reached Wellesley. Soult was in the field again, and at a point which meant danger to his communications. But Soult, Wellesley believed, could not bring against him more than 12,000 or 15,000 men. And yet, at that moment, 50,000 were concentrating at Salamanca! On the 30th fuller news

came in, and Wellesley abandoned the idea of marching on Madrid, and turned back to guard his communications from Soult. He left his wounded to the care of Cuesta, who undertook to strengthen his position and hold it against all attacks.

On the night of August 3 Wellesley reached Oropesa, with Soult only fifteen miles distant; on the morning of the 4th, Cuesta's columns were in sight from Oropesa! He had broken faith with Wellesley once more; and, on the news reaching him that Victor was advancing, abandoned the British wounded, and hurried to join Wellesley. On the 3rd, as it happened, both Soult and Wellesley for the first time, got reasonably correct information as to each other's movements. Soult, from a captured despatch, found that Wellesley, on the 1st, was still at Talavera, and, at that date, believed the force on his flank not to exceed 12,000 men. Wellesley, at the same moment, learned, from an intercepted despatch, that Soult had at least 30,000 men.

Wellesley's position was little short of desperate. He had an army of 50,000 striking at his flank, another of 25,000 was pressing on his rear. His troops were exhausted; his allies were worthless. But it was in exactly such a crisis that Wellesley's greatness as a soldier—his coolness, his sure judgment, his swiftness of action—shone out. Cuesta, with Spanish unreason and stubbornness, wished to stand and fight, but Wellesley sternly declared the

British army should go; and, says Napier, "that declaration saved the Peninsula." At dawn he set his baggage and guns moving towards the bridge at Arzobispo; at noon his columns marched, and by two o'clock the bridge was crossed. But Wellesley was not yet safe. His peril lay in the fact that the French advance-guard was at that moment nearer the bridge at Almaraz than his brigades, and a well-made road ran straight before it to the bridge. Wellesley chose Craufurd, with the Light Division, the quickest marchers in his army, and pushed them across rough and almost roadless mountain country. It was a close race, but Craufurd won. He reached Almaraz, and had just finished destroying the bridge as the leading files of Soult's cavalry came in sight.

Cuesta, with the Spaniards, remained to guard the Arzobispo bridge, while Wellesley pushed on to Delaytosa. The French roughly drove the Spaniards back from that bridge on August 8th, but they did not follow the British. They were paralysed by divided counsels, and supplies were failing them. The campaign of Talavera was at an end, and Wellesley announced his intention of falling back into Portugal. "I have fished in many troubled waters," he said, "but Spanish troubled waters I will never fish in again."

The campaign brought Wellesley some rewards. He was raised to the peerage by the title of Baron Douro of Wellesley, and Viscount Wellington of

Talavera. So the name by which he is best known in history came to him, and will be used in the succeeding pages. The Spanish junta made him captain-general, and he accepted the title while declining the salary attached to it. But he sternly refused to join in further operations with the Spanish. He established his headquarters at Jaraicego, thus holding the great road to Lisbon. From this he could easily cross the Tagus and strike at the flank of any of the enemy's columns moving down the left bank of that river. At the same time he covered Cadiz, where the central junta, driven out of Madrid and Seville, had taken refuge. All through the summer heats he held that position at an enormous cost of suffering and loss from disease to his army. It is true that from August 20, 1809, to February 27, 1810—the date of the first skirmish in the new campaign—a period of six months, not a shot was fired from a British musket. Wellesley was acting on his declared policy of taking no part in the Spanish campaign. He was, during these months, brooding over the sterner campaign, against a yet mightier foe, which lay before him. "But," says Napier, "it was not Talavera; it was the position maintained by Wellesley on the Guadiana, which, in the latter part of 1809, saved Andalusia from subjection."

From his camp, Wellington watched Spanish armies, one after another, overthrown by the French till in the final disaster of Ocana, on November 19,

the last of the Spanish forces almost ceased to exist. An army of 46,000 infantry and 6000 cavalry "was dispersed," says Colborne, who was present, "in fifteen minutes." A sullen, inextinguishable guerilla warfare still smouldered, and it needed 70,000 French soldiers to hold Spain in subjection; but organised warfare was, for the moment, at an end.

On January 15, 1810, Wellington recrossed the Tagus. The crossing of that stream marked a decisive epoch in the Peninsular War. The policy of combining operations with the Spanish armies and of striking directly at the great mass of the French had failed, and was abandoned. The war had now to be fought in a new field, and take a new shape.

There were six campaigns in the Peninsular War, but the struggle itself was a unit. It might be described as one vast game of chess, with two kingdoms as the board, the armies of France, Spain, Portugal, and Great Britain as pieces, and the players—though half Europe parted them—were Wellington and Napoleon. The stake was not simply the deliverance of Spain and Portugal, or even the security of Great Britain; it was the fate of Europe. Wellington had won the first moves in the game. He had driven Junot out of Portugal; he had chased Soult, with the loss of his guns and equipment, from Oporto; he had defeated Victor and King Joseph at Talavera. But Napoleon was a terrible antagonist. His combinations, even before Talavera was fought, put Soult

on Wellington's flank with three army corps, while Victor stood in his front with 30,000 men. Wellington escaped that combination, but the whole condition of the game was changed by the discovery he made of the unreliability of Spanish promises, and the worthlessness of Spanish armies. Wellington knew the vast resources at the command of his opponent; he knew, too, the ruthless energy and the commanding genius with which those resources would be employed against him. Napoleon had won the battle of Wagram; a treaty of peace in central Europe was sure to follow, and Napoleon would be free to pour his veterans into Spain. How could Wellington best meet the storm of war about to break upon him? It is probable that he was the only man who believed that it would be still possible to hold Portugal against the utmost strength of France. And it was still certain that while Portugal was held, Spain was unsubdued, and "the Spanish ulcer" remained open.

Wellington was called upon to advise the British Cabinet on the whole situation, and Lord Liverpool's letter of October 20, 1809, shows how faint was his hope of ultimate success. His chief anxiety was to ascertain "how far the British army would be endangered, and its embarkation likely to be prevented, if the French penetrated in force into Portugal." "I am convinced," Wellington wrote in reply, "we could embark after defeat"; but he did not believe that ultimately he would be

defeated. "My opinion is that the enemy ought to make the possession of Portugal their first objective; but," he added, "they can be resisted," and successfully resisted; and he proceeded to formulate with great precision the price Great Britain must pay for maintaining the contest. The British army must be kept at an effective level of 30,000 men—later he raised the estimate to 35,000—but the cost of sustaining the army in Portugal, exclusive of the hire of transports, was only £500,000 more than it would cost if in quarters in England. Portuguese finances must be nourished by an increased subsidy, 10,000 more Portuguese should be taken into English pay. With an army of 30,000 good troops, a Portuguese subsidy of £1,000,000 a year, and absolute authority in Portugal itself, Wellington believed he could resist any force Napoleon could direct against him. There was a fine modesty as well as high courage in Wellington's estimate. War has its uncertainties; he might fail and have to embark. "But if we do go," he wrote, "I feel a little anxiety to go like gentlemen out of the hall door, particularly after all the preparations I have made to enable us to do so, and not out of the back door, or by the area."

It was a cool, daring, yet reasoned calculation; and if it showed great genius on Wellington's part thus to assess all the factors in a problem so

tremendous, and measure the exact conditions of success, it also showed high courage on the part of the British Cabinet that they ventured both their own political existence and the fortunes of England on the unsupported judgment of their chosen general.

Wellington's new plan began with the reorganisation of Portugal itself. He would revive the ancient military laws and enact the levy *en masse* of the ordenanza, a familiar and ancient device in Portuguese history, a recognised signal that the nation was in peril, and all citizens were called to arms. Wellington did not hope to prevent the invasion of Portugal. Napoleon, he calculated, would launch across the Portuguese frontier an army of 100,000 men, and against this force Wellington proposed to use famine as a weapon. His own bitter experiences in the Talavera campaign, and the knowledge he had gained of the unfriendliness of Spanish geography to great armies, probably suggested this device to him. It was certain that the invading French army would destroy everything in their path, and would extract out of the destruction they inflicted upon the country the means of subduing it. On Wellington's plan —which required the towns and villages to be abandoned, the crops to be burnt or carried off, the mills and bridges to be destroyed, the fields laid waste—the injury to Portugal would not be

greater than that a French invasion would inflict; but that very injury would be turned into a weapon against France, and into a means of deliverance for Portugal.

The last feature in Wellington's plans, their crown and keystone, was the creation of the lines of Torres Vedras. He would turn 500 square miles of wild hills into a natural and impregnable citadel round Lisbon itself. Such a stupendous fortress, with a wasted country, which yielded no supplies to the attacking force, in front, the Tagus held by the British fleet as its base, and 30,000 British troops as a garrison, was a conception which had never yet emerged in war. It was conceived, and executed, in such secrecy, and wrapped in such profound silence, that not only the French, but even Wellington's own troops, and the British Ministry itself, were in ignorance of its existence. The genius which, so long in advance, and with such perfect secrecy, created a mountain fortress on such a scale must have been of the very first rank. That triple shield of scarped mountains drawn round Lisbon was a fit reflex—an expression in concrete terms—of the brain which constructed it.

When the last army of Spain had been scattered at Ocana, and Napoleon had overthrown Austria at Wagram, and made peace on his own terms, then the lists were set, and the trumpets blown, for a supreme trial of strength betwixt Napoleon and the

one foe yet unsubdued across the Portuguese frontier. Wellington wrote his forecast of the issue in sober words, which history has fully verified;[1] and he sustained his policy by a quite final argument: "If we cannot persevere in carrying the contest on in the Peninsula or elsewhere on the continent, we must prepare to make one of our own islands the seat of war. . . . If Bonaparte cannot root us out of this country, he must alter his system in Europe, and give us such a peace as we ought to accept."

[1] *Vide infra*, p. 329.

CHAPTER IX

A NEW ANTAGONIST

"Masséna was an old fox; he took no risks. He gave me more trouble than any of them."—WELLESLEY.

NOW that every other foe had left the arena, Napoleon turned to smite fiercely, and with all his strength, at Spain. It was the one field where his arms had failed. One French army had surrendered at Baylen; another had returned ignobly to France in British transports, having capitulated. Moore's thrust at his communications had arrested Napoleon himself in his march on southern Spain; Wellington had driven Soult in ruin from Oporto, and overthrown Victor and King Joseph at Talavera. This was more than a wound to the prestige of Napoleon's arms. It stung his personal pride. It disquieted his strategic instinct as a soldier. For a British army in Portugal was the point of a sword menacing the flank of the Grand Army in central Europe.

In July, 1809, before the news of Talavera had reached him, Napoleon, writing from Schönbrunn, gave orders for the preparation of a great force for

service in Spain. On October 7, after the peace with Austria was signed, and writing from Vienna, he directed that 100,000 men should be collected between Bayonne and Orleans, and announced that he himself would lead this army into Spain. He appointed Soult major-general. "Until I arrive," he said, "you shall be responsible. I wish myself to enter Lisbon as soon as possible." And "at the moment he displayed himself beyond the Pyrenees," Napoleon informed his *corps législatif*, "the leopard in terror will seek the ocean to avoid defeat and death." In Napoleon's rhetoric, "the British leopard" was a timid beast, always prepared to commit suicide when it was whispered that the French were about to arrive.

But in 1810, Napoleon found another occupation. He had divorced Josephine, and his marriage with an Austrian archduchess made such an adventure as a campaign in Spain for the moment impossible to him. On April 17, 1810, he appointed Masséna "commander-in-chief of the army of Portugal," and charged him with the task of "driving the British out of Lisbon."

Napoleon had in a supreme degree the art of choosing fit instruments, and Masséna was, on Wellington's own testimony, the ablest of the French generals. "He had the best military head amongst all Napoleon's captains." "Soult," he told Croker, "was an excellent tactician, but did not quite under-

stand the field of battle. He knew how to bring his troops to the field, but not so well how to use them when he had brought them up." But Masséna, to quote Wellington again, "was an old fox; he took no risks. He gave me more trouble than any of them, because where I expected to find him weak, he generally contrived somehow that I should find him strong."

Masséna was fifty-two years of age, and had won fame as a soldier while Napoleon was only an artillery officer at Toulon. He was an Italian by birth, a Jew by race, with the intellectual gifts, and more than the vices, of the worst examples of both types. He had the morals of a thief; his licentiousness was bestial; he was a trickster to his finger-tips. But he was a great soldier, swift to seize, as the battle of Zürich proves; obstinate to hold, as his defence of Genoa witnesses. Wellington, who read with unerring instinct the qualities of the general opposed to him, was accustomed to say in after years that when Masséna was in front he never permitted himself to take the risks that he accepted readily when in the presence of any other of Napoleon's marshals.

Napoleon put under Masséna's command a force of 130,000 men, of whom 86,000 were available for immediate service in the field, and in its ranks were included 15,000 of the Young Guard. The total French forces in Spain, in September 1810, amounted

to no less than 353,000, but the task of holding down Spain, and of maintaining communications with France, explains why Masséna, for the purpose of striking at Wellington, had only 86,000 under his immediate command, and some 40,000 in his second line. When he began his advance into Portugal on September 16, indeed, he had only 72,000 effective troops in his columns. Wellington at that moment had 49,000, of which only 25,000 were British.

When Napoleon placed this formidable army under Masséna, he prescribed for him a plan of campaign in which, curiously enough, all the familiar principles of Napoleon's own methods were inverted. Masséna was not to move swiftly, or attempt any brilliant strategic feats. It was to be a campaign of delay. He must not enter Lisbon too soon, "as it would be difficult to feed the city with its immense population." He "could spend the summer months," Napoleon wrote on May 29, "in taking Ciudad Rodrigo, and then Almeida." He "need not hurry, but can go methodically to work." Masséna, in a word, was to take no risks. Like Strafford, he was to be "thorough," and he was to use all the deliberation that thoroughness required. French arms in Spain could hardly survive another failure. The movements of all the French forces in Spain were made subsidiary to Masséna's great adventure. Meanwhile, Spain was

divided into a sort of French version of the Heptarchy. Each district was held by a separate corps, and held down and administered with stern severity.

The general situation at that moment was very remarkable. One great Power in Europe after another had abandoned the conflict with Napoleon. Great Britain alone remained in arms against the master of the civilised world. In Spain only a guerilla warfare was maintained. In Portugal the royal family had fled to America, and that strip of coast looking out on the Atlantic was nothing more than a field of battle chosen for strategic reasons by Great Britain. "In the midst of this tempest," says Hooper, "Wellington and the army he commanded were the only forces erect, compact, and undaunted."

But that is a very inexact description of the situation. There were many doubts as to the power to resist Napoleon, both in the British Cabinet and amongst Wellington's own staff. The chief anxiety of Ministers was to whether the British army could "escape" from Spain. It was Liverpool himself—at that moment Secretary of State for War—who wrote that "the re-embarkation of the army would probably begin about September." Wellington himself complained sternly of the letters written by many of his own commanders, letters that breathed doubt and not courage, and that abounded in pre-

dictions of failure. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the one absolutely cool head, the one sure judgment, the one clear courageous spirit in the path of Napoleon's strategy, was to be found in Wellington himself.

Masséna's first business was to capture the fortresses which stood in the line of his approach to Portugal. He began the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo early in June, and it fell on July 11. It was gallantly held, and its commander, Herrasti, appealed to Wellington again and again for help, "O, venir, Luego! Luego! Luego! a secorrer esta plaza"—"Oh, come now! now! now! to succour this place." But Wellington had a clear vision of the relative sizes of things. He had warned Herrasti that he would not sacrifice the campaign to save a fortress. "I must leave the mountains and cross the plains, as well as two rivers, to raise the siege. Is it right to risk a general action to raise the siege of Ciudad Rodrigo? I should think not." Picton put the situation even more expressively. "If we attempt to relieve the place," he wrote, "the French will drive us out of Portugal, while if they get possession of it they will lose time, which is more important to them than Ciudad Rodrigo. But they have got to find this out."

Masséna won his second fortress, Almeida, more cheaply than the first. A lucky bomb exploded the magazine of the place, and, as with a breath,

the castle, the cathedral, and the whole central portion of the town disappeared in dust and smoke. Five hundred of the garrison perished at a breath, and nothing remained but to surrender the ruins to the French. Masséna's course was now clear for the march on Lisbon.

While Masséna was clearing the ground for his advance by besieging Ciudad Rodrigo and Almeida, Wellington employed Craufurd—the soldier he could best trust on such a task—with the famous Light Division, to watch the French movements, and report the first sign of an advance. And as a commander of outposts Craufurd was unsurpassed. He was at once a fiery Scot and a scientific soldier, a man of brilliant abilities, but of vehement temper, and, it may be added, of many misfortunes. He was five years older than Wellington, eight years older than Hill, and yet was only a junior brigadier-general. But Wellington knew Craufurd's gifts, and charged him with a great task.

Craufurd had to keep watch on a front of forty miles against a French army six times his own strength, and commanded by Ney; yet he was never surprised; he never lost an outpost, and never failed to keep Wellington informed of the latest movement on the part of the enemy. He flung his cavalry piquets so far out, and knitted them together by an organisation so perfect, that it was as though the whole of Masséna's front were touched with sensitive

antennæ, so that every movement in the French camp sent an answering vibration back to Wellington's headquarters. "The Light Division itself," says Napier, "was kept at so high a pitch of efficiency that seven minutes sufficed, even in the middle of the night, to put it under arms, and fifteen minutes' notice, night or day, brought it in order of battle, to its alarm posts, with its baggage loaded and in position." For four months Craufurd maintained his watch with this perfection of vigilance. Wellington's school certainly bred fine soldiers.

Craufurd's hot temper was no doubt too much for his cool head in the end. He had kept "a weak division for three months within two hours' march of 60,000 men, appropriating the resources of the plains entirely to himself." But in defiance of orders he held his position too long on the farther side of the Coa, until Ney, the quickest of Napoleon's generals, struck at him with 24,000 infantry, 5000 cavalry, and 30 guns. Craufurd escaped after one of the most picturesque and bloody fights in the whole war; but it was with the loss of over 300 in killed and wounded, Ney himself losing 1000 men. "I am glad to see you safe, Craufurd," said Wellington, when he met him after the fight. "Oh, I was in no danger, I assure you," was Craufurd's reply. "But I was from your conduct," said Wellington. Craufurd's sole comment as he walked away was, "He is d——d crusty to-day."

It was uncertain whether Masséna would advance

on Lisbon by the north or the south bank of the Tagus. The southern bank offered the easier approach, but when traversed, it left the invading army on the wrong side of the estuary of the Tagus, which, for twenty miles inland from Lisbon, expands into a tidal lagoon from four to eleven miles broad. The northern bank offered the more difficult road, but led clear into Lisbon. Wellington, with his uncanny power of reading the mind of his antagonist, wrote in October 1809, "The enemy will make his main attack by the right of the Tagus, but he will employ one corps on the left of the river. The object will be, by means of the corps south of the Tagus, to turn the position which we shall take against the corps north of that river, to cut off from Lisbon the corps opposed to him, and destroy it by an attack on the front and rear."[1] That would have been ideal strategy, but no serious movement was made on the south of the Tagus until—when Masséna had already begun to fall back from Wellington's lines — Soult moved in that direction.

But Wellington had, from the first, to guard against both branches of this strategy. He wrote to Hill on December 18, 1809, "I shall form two principal corps, both consisting of British and Portuguese troops, the larger of which will reach to the north-west, and I shall command myself, the other will be for the present upon the Tagus,

[1] "Despatches," vol. v. p. 235.

and hereafter it may be moved forward to Alemtejo," and he offered this command to Hill. His immediate business was to watch Reynier, who with a strong force was far down south threatening Abrantes. Reynier was a formidable enemy, clever in tactics, fierce in stroke, and Hill's post was one that needed cool judgment and sleepless vigilance. He was to keep touch with Reynier, yet not be entangled in a fight with him. If Reynier slipped from his front to join Masséna he was instantly to rejoin Wellington. Wellington, indeed, had thought out every contingency, and supplied Hill with a set of instructions to meet each as it arose. As one of Hill's brigadiers told him with a laugh, "he was given the choice of acting in eleven different situations."

The post would perhaps have suited no other of Wellington's generals except Hill. Picton, slower in brain than Hill, but a hard fighter, would have come short of Wellington's instructions; Craufurd, with his strain of impatient genius, would have gone beyond them; and both would probably have sought a battle on their own account. But it was Hill's supreme merit, in Wellington's eyes, that he never forgot his instructions, and he never exceeded them. He exactly understood his commander-in-chief's mind. Reynier was never suffered to get too far from him, so as to escape notice, or too near to him, so as to involve the risk of

a battle; and when finally Reynier turned the heads of his columns northward, plainly to join Masséna, Hill, without further orders, pushed at speed to the Mondego, joined Wellington, and was in time to put his division into the battle-line on the hill at Busaco.

Wellington's arrangements were now complete. He had a line of posts from Almeida to Castel Branco, and on whatever road the French advanced, the movement was instantly reported. Wellington, at Celorico, on the Mondego, kept vigilant watch till Masséna's strategy became clear. A great army moves slowly, and Masséna, a wary commander, covered his front with a cavalry screen, and hid the secret of his route from his vigilant foe as long as possible. By September 15, it was clear, however, that Masséna had chosen the right bank of the Tagus. There remained the further question: which side of the Mondego would he take? There were two routes—one by Celorico, another by Vizeu. Both were difficult; that by Vizeu was almost impassable; and Wellington had to hold the movement of his troops suspended till he knew what choice his enemy had made. Not till the 17th was it clear that, trusting to bad maps, and misled by the ignorance as to their own country of the Portuguese officers on his staff, Masséna had taken the route by Vizeu. "There are many bad roads in Portugal," said Wellington.

"but the enemy has decidedly taken the worst in the whole kingdom."

Vizeu itself, a town with a population of 9000, no doubt tempted Masséna by the possibility it offered of yielding supplies, for already the French general was making the discovery that, in the sterile and savage country through which he was moving, starvation was a deadlier peril to a great army than the guns and bayonets of its enemies. Wellington's plan of leaving nothing but a naked countryside to the French was proving effective. It is true that it was carried out only imperfectly. Had his instructions been obeyed, not a goat or a fowl, not a flask of wine or a grain of wheat, would have been left for Masséna's hungry columns. Every bridge was to be broken, every mill destroyed, every river cleared of boats. The towns would have been left empty, the farms deserted; the French would have found themselves marching through a desert. But it is difficult to sweep a whole countryside clean of food and life in this heroic fashion. The Portuguese in many cases hid their stores instead of destroying them, and the French, pricked by hunger, grew amazingly ingenious in the business of their discovery. Still, Wellington's policy was sorely troubling his enemy. Masséna already, although he had hardly exchanged a shot with the British, was suffering almost as much damage as a lost battle might

have inflicted. He could not horse his guns, and had to abandon one-third of his artillery. The policy of living on the country broke down. He decided he must carry a minimum supply of fifteen days' food with him, and there was the utmost difficulty in getting transport for even this scanty supply.

The state of the roads—or rather the absence of any roads on the route now taken—astonished and exasperated the French. Masséna exploded day after day in furious letters to Berthier. "It is impossible," he wrote, "to find worse roads than these. They bristle with rocks, the guns and train have suffered severely, and I must wait for them. I must leave them two days at Vizeu when they come in to rest themselves. . . . Sir, all our marches are across a desert, not a soul to be seen anywhere, everything is abandoned." The story of how his guns struggled along the thread-like, rocky, and almost impossible track to Vizeu, and beyond it, is told in much distressful literature on the part of French historians.

The course of Masséna's advance now led him down the narrow valley betwixt the right bank of the Mondego and the Caramula Sierra. Here a steep ridge, a lofty hog's-back of dull red granite, its front like the frowning and battered wall of some vast and ancient castle, stretched from the river to the mountains, a distance of nearly nine

miles. Busaco, with its gapped and splintered front, shaggy with heather and furze, was an ideal position for a defensive fight. It was, it is true, no part of Wellington's original plan to fight a battle at this stage of operations. His plan was to fall back to the great lines at Torres Vedras, drawing the French as far from their base as possible, and then to watch while Masséna's famine-wasted battalions spent their strength in vain on those vast defences. But Busaco was a singularly strong position. That stern granite wall might be successfully held against any direct attack; it might be turned; it could not be carried. A vigorous, offensive stroke, Wellington always held, was a wholesome feature in a retreat. A successful fight would act like the tonic of some stern wine on his mixed army. It would be a pledge to the Portuguese that the retreat towards Lisbon did not mean the abandonment of the campaign. It would secure ample time for carrying out the difficult policy of sweeping the country of all supplies, which was an essential feature of Wellington's plans. The French, moreover, would be taught a useful lesson as to the fighting quality of the British.

Wellington, in a word, felt much as Jervis did when he saw the Spanish three-deckers under his lee at Cape St. Vincent. "A victory," he said, thinking of political opinion in Great Britain,

"would be very useful just now." And Busaco, like the battle off Cape St. Vincent, was fought rather for political than for military reasons. "Croakers about useless battles will attack me again about that of Busaco," wrote Wellington a week after the battle, "but I should have been inexcusable if, knowing what I did, I had not attempted to stop the enemy there. . . . It has removed an impression which began to be very general that we intended to fight no more, but retire to our ships, and it has given the Portuguese a taste for an amusement to which they were not before accustomed, and which they would not have acquired if I had not put them in a very strong position."

CHAPTER X

BUSACO

"Sept. 27th: An ill-omened day, which was to behold one of the most terrible reverses which the French army ever suffered."—MARBOT.

THE ridge on which the great fight took place is formidable, not for its height, but for its front, rough and steep, shaggy with scrub, corrugated with tiny ravines, and scarred with jagged precipices. The ravine which parts it from the opposing hills is, at the centre, profound in depth, but very narrow. It stretches, east and west, from the river to the Sierra, a distance of nine miles, and this, in the days when quick-firing guns and long-range rifles were unknown, was, by its mere extent, a dangerous front for an army of 50,000 men to hold. Four or five roads climbed the ridge, but only two of them were fairly good, and by these two the French attacked. One is on the left centre of the British position, the principal road from Celorico to Coimbra. It crosses the ridge close to the convent on its summit. Farther to the east is the road running to Palheiros, by

FRENCH IN MARCH
28TH. SEPT.
Martagoa
Sardao
Boyalva
S. Caramula
Avelenso
8TH. CORPS
CAVALRY
2ND. CORPS
NEY
LEIGH'S BRIGADE
CRAWFORD'S BRIGADE
REGNIER
St. Antº da Cantara
BRITISH CAVALRY
Milheada
Convent
1ST. DIVISION
5TH. DIVISION
CAVALRY
Botaco
G. HILL
Alva R.
Sierra Busaco
Pena Cova
Mondego R.
Sierra Murcella
To Coimbra
To Coimbra
BATTLE OF BUSACO
Sept. 29th. 1810.
British
French
Walker & Boutall sc.

which Reynier sent his columns. It crosses a depression in the ridge. Wellington evidently regarded these two roads as the vulnerable points in his position, and had put his best fighting divisions about them. Craufurd with the Light Division was on the left of the road leading by the convent, Spencer with the Guards on the right. The right of Picton's division touched the left of Leith's just where the road to Palheiros crossed the ridge. In the centre, where Craufurd's men stood, a narrow gully runs like a wound into the face of the hill; the road clings to its flank and curves round its head. Here the guns of the Light Division were placed within a semicircle of boulders, the gaps forming natural embrasures, so that the road could be swept with deadly effect.

Wellington's other divisions were distributed along the range, Hill holding the right, Cole the extreme left. Immediately about the convent the ridge is flat topped, and Wellington brought up some squadrons of dragoons and placed them in the rear of the Guards. They might ride in with good effect on the heads of the French columns if they succeeded in gaining the summit of the ridge. The ridge narrows to almost a knife-edge farther to the right, but a rough country path runs, parallel with the ridge, a few hundred yards down the reverse side of the slope, and this made it possible for reinforcements to be sent from

one part of the line to the other unseen by the enemy. Some sixty guns were distributed in tiny clusters of pieces along the whole front. By 10.30 on the 26th, Wellington had all his regiments in position.

As the story of the battle is generally told, Ney, with the French advance-guard, reached the British position early in the afternoon of the 25th, and before three o'clock 40,000 French infantry were drawn up in masses near the two roads we have named, while their skirmishers were busy disputing with the British pickets on the wooded slopes of the great hill. Ney, so the tradition runs, with the keen eye of a great soldier, saw that the ridge was only half occupied by the British, and would have attacked, but his commander-in-chief was twenty miles to the rear; so a great chance was missed. But Oman, with the patient and convincing industry of the student, has examined all the literature on the subject, including the French archives, and proves beyond doubt that it was only on the morning of the 26th Ney examined the British position. It was true he wished to attack it then, but at that moment Wellington had every man in line, while not half the French army was in position.

All through the afternoon of the 26th Masséna's huge army was slowly coming into sight. The British, watching from the far-stretching broken summit of the ridge, saw the countless files of the

French, their bayonets glittering in the sun, come through every valley, down the tiny tracks of the hill slopes and through the blackness of the forest. Then came the guns, the baggage waggons, long lines of mules with packs, flocks of sheep and goats. "It seemed," says Leith Hay, who watched the sight, "like the migration of a people rather than the march of an army." If a vision of the scale of Masséna's army could have chilled the imagination of the British regiments, the spectacle that evening, as the hills were throwing their long shadows over the gloomy ravine at their feet, might have served the French general's plans better even than the muskets of his gallant battalions the next morning. But the British soldier is hardly to be thrown into a panic through his imagination. Wellington's infantry, for the first time, saw, spread out at their feet, the great force which the genius of Napoleon had despatched for their overthrow, and they exchanged rough jests with each other as they watched the sight. Their slender knotted line of red-coated regiments, they were sure, would not break even when such a mass of armed strength was flung upon it.

The night fell, keen and cold, on the hill crest; black in the depths of the ravine below. In the valleys, and on the hill-slopes opposite the darkness was pricked with innumerable camp fires, and all through the night Wellington's outposts could hear,

almost like the murmur of the sea, the confused noises of the great French camp as they floated up from the valley.

All the French critics since, with the cheap wisdom that comes after the event, hold that Masséna, instead of sending his battalions up the rough front of the great hill, should have done on the morning of the 26th, and before the battle, what he did late that night when the battle was lost. He should have pushed past Wellington's left flank by the road to Coimbra. Marbot relates how he tried to suggest this plan to his commander-in-chief, and asserts that in the council of war held to settle details for the battle, this plan was urged by Masséna's chief of staff; but Masséna put it aside. "It is the first time that Wellington seems ready to give battle," he said, "and I ought to profit by the opportunity."

Masséna's battle-plan had the merit of a certain massive simplicity. He resolved to strike at Wellington's front at two points, and put a whole army corps in each column of attack. Reynier had charge of the left column; Ney of the right. The attacks, curiously enough, were not to be simultaneous. Ney was only to move when he saw that Reynier had reached the crown of the hill and established himself there; then Ney was to strike. Ney was to move along the road which led past the convent. Reynier was to climb the track which led

from San Antonio de Cantaro to Palheiros. His attack was to be in two columns—the left consisting of fifteen battalions, or 8000 men; the right of eleven battalions, or 6500 men. Ney's attack was on the same plan, and was as massive in scale. Masséna knew that Wellington's regiments, scattered along a front of nearly nine miles, must make a very thin thread indeed, and the infantry of an entire French army corps, daringly led, and flung in one shattering column on a single point in that slender line, would surely break it. And when two such attacks, at as many points, were hurled against that line, how could it escape being torn to fragments? Masséna had yet to learn the resisting power of a line of British infantry.

The morning of the 27th broke heavy with mists. There was a stern hush on the long hill crest where the British regiments were already standing drawn up for battle; but far down, out of the mist that hid the depths of the ravine, there came all the noise of an army preparing for attack—the call of trumpets, the faint pulse of beaten drums, and every now and again the shrill, clear sound of the fife.

The British outposts had been thrust low down the hillside and were hidden in the mist, and now the sudden rattle of muskets under that roof of fog told that the French attack had started, and Masséna's tirailleurs were contending with the British outposts. Reynier came on in two huge columns—

one on the narrow track itself, the other to the right of it. All the battalions were in column formation, with a front of one company only. The roughness of the hillside, the sharpness of the skirmishing, soon broke the steady contour of the disciplined human mass, so that when it came clear out of the mists, "the assault," to the watching British on the summit, to quote Oman, "seemed to be delivered by a string, or succession, of crowds crossing the hillside diagonally."

The leading column, splendidly led, came on with great resolution, and was presently smitten by the fire of the light companies of some of Picton's regiments which had been thrust a little down the slope. Owing to the contour of the ground, or the fire of these companies, Reynier's leading battalions swung to their left, and Grattan, in his "Adventures with the Connaught Rangers," says that this movement took them out of sight of the 88th which held the summit immediately above them, and Wallace made a corresponding move with his regiment to his right. The roll of musketry from the French attack, mixed with the clamour of voices, deepened, but still the fold of the hill prevented Wallace seeing what was happening. He knew that there was a space of unoccupied ground to his left, for luck had led Reynier's column up to what was perhaps the weakest point in Wellington's whole line. Betwixt the 88th and the next regiment, the 45th, there was

nearly half a mile of unoccupied ground. Wallace then sent the captain of his Grenadier Company on the run to see what was happening beyond the shoulder of the hill.

"In a few moments Dunne returned almost breathless; he said the rocks were filling fast with Frenchmen, that a heavy column was coming up the hill beyond the rocks, and that the four companies of the 45th were about to be attacked. Wallace asked if he thought half the 88th would be able to do the business. 'You will want every man,' was the reply. Wallace, with a steady but cheerful countenance, turned to his men, and looking them full in the face, said, 'Now, Connaught Rangers, mind what you are going to do; when I bring you face to face with those French rascals, drive them down the hill—don't give the false touch, but push home to the muzzle."

The French were breathless as the result of their climb. They had gained the actual crest of the hill; they had only to hold it. Their officers were shouting and gesticulating in the effort to get them into formation. But Wallace was an officer of the finest type; he threw the 88th into column and took it forward at the double till the French came in sight. Part of Merle's column had seized a cluster of rocks, and Wallace, with quick decision, detached three companies to clear the French from that strong position. He had caught up four companies of the 45th who were firing on the French column, and was about to charge. To his right, however, was a battalion of Portuguese infantry who were firing into space, on general principles, and their fire

[1] Grattan, p. 33.

swept the ground over which Wallace must lead his men. He sent one of his officers running to tell the Portuguese to cease firing, but the unfortunate officer himself was killed by a Portuguese bullet.

There was no time for delay. Wallace jumped from his horse, called on his men to follow him, and with Gwynne of the 45th on one side of him, and Captain Seaton of the 88th on the other, ran forward at a charging pace into the midst of the terrible flame in his front. Less than four battalions were attacking eleven. Wellington himself, with Beresford, watched the attack of the 88th, and Beresford, according to a familiar story, broke into exclamations of protest against the rashness of the stroke. But the rush of the 88th and the 45th caught the French, disordered by climbing the steep hill, and before they had recovered their order. The rolling volleys of Wallace's men were deadly, and when they ran in vehemently with the bayonet, the huge French column swayed for a moment, and then dissolved into a mere mob, and went down the slope shattered and wrecked. "Wellington, at this point," says Grattan, "turned to Beresford, and tapping him on the shoulder, said, 'Look at them now, Beresford.'"

Reynier's other column had been checked and broken by the fire of the 74th and of some Portuguese battalions, added to the grape from a battery of

guns which tore it almost to pieces. But Foy by this time was bringing up the third section of Reynier's attack. He had only seven battalions, while Merle had eleven, and as his files advanced the broken wrecks of the whole eleven swept past them in a tumult of flight, with Wallace's red-coats hanging on their rear. The sight might well have chilled the *élan* of Foy's battalions. But they were veterans. They swung a little to the right, and though smitten with a cruel fire on their flank, and tormented with the musketry of the British skirmishers, pressed swiftly up the hill till they reached the crest. The weight of the charging French swept back the right wing of the 45th and some Portuguese battalions, and broke roughly through Wellington's line. For the second time a French column had gained the hill, and Foy's rush was more menacing than that of Merle.

But Cameron with the 9th and the 38th moved swiftly up; he sent the 38th running to hold the reverse edge of the crest against the French, and then charged their flank with the 9th. The long red line moved swiftly, with a succession of volleys that rang deep and sharp like the blast of artillery fire. When within twenty yards of the French, by this time sorely shaken with such a fire, Cameron's men closed on them with the bayonet. The effect was overwhelming. "The head of my column," says Foy, "fell back to its right; despite my efforts

I could not get them to deploy. Disorder set in, they raced down-hill in headlong flight. The enemy pursued us half-way to the foot of the hill."

It is not often a French general tells the story of his own defeat so frankly, but Foy had the honesty as well as the courage of a good soldier. His attack was more obstinate and more nearly successful than that of Merle, but it was very costly. Merle's division of eleven battalions lost in killed and wounded 1041 men. Foy's column of only seven battalions lost 978, a loss proportionally still heavier.

The tactical failure in Masséna's arrangements becomes visible at this point. Reynier's battalions twice gained, and for a moment held, the crest, but there was half-an-hour's interval in time betwixt the two attacks, and they reached the crest at points a considerable distance from each other. The interval in time, and in distance, betwixt their charges did not perhaps rob them of success, but it certainly lessened their chance of succeeding.

Ney's attack was as formidable in scale, and as resolute in spirit, as Reynier's, but it was defeated as completely, and in even less time. He waited till he saw the head of Reynier's column on the actual crest of the hill, and then he moved, Loison leading his right column, Marchand the left. As they climbed the hill the columns took opposite sides of the deep ravine which ran into the centre of the hill, and Loison's ill fate led him to that point

of the line held by Craufurd with the Light Division. That fine soldier had placed the 95th and a Portuguese battalion—1300 rifles in all—low down the slope of the hill in skirmishing order; he kept the 43rd and the 52nd, with a Portuguese regiment, lying down in a hollow behind the lip of the crest.

The French column stubbornly, but with great loss, tore its way through the British skirmishing line, crept past Ross's guns, which flashed upon them from a cluster of broken rocks on their flank, and at last reached what they believed to be the crest of the hill. Standing on the sky-line by the side of a little windmill Craufurd had watched the gallant column force its way up to the summit. The impulse of victory ran through their ranks; the crest seemed empty—they had almost reached it, their leading files were pushing over it. At that moment Craufurd waved his hat and called out, "Now, 52nd, revenge the death of Sir John Moore!" Then over the crest the long red line of the 52nd and 43rd suddenly broke upon the vision of the astonished French. It came swiftly on, a menacing spectacle. With fine courage, however, the French stood their ground, and the head of the column opened a murderous fire on the advancing line. But without check or pause Craufurd's line came on, till at a distance, according to one spectator, of "not more than five yards," it thrice poured a tremendous volley into the French. Then came the charge, the

fierce push home of a stretch of 2000 bayonets. And torn almost to fragments, the French column, with a dreadful tumult of sound, was flung down the hill. Reynier had brought twenty-two battalions into the actual fight and they had been simply wrecked, losing more than 2000 killed and wounded, and all this as the result of their conflict with eleven battalions of Wellington's force—only 6000 of these being British. The killed and wounded in Ney's battalions amounted to 2456.

What was the secret of the success of the British infantry? In this close, swift, and bloody contest forty-five battalions in all attacked twenty-four battalions, and the twenty-four won! It would be false to say that the French attack failed in courage. No onfall could have been more resolute and gallant, or more finely led. The proportion of officers killed and wounded in this fight was higher than in any during the whole Peninsular War, a proof of the daring leadership shown in both attacks. It would be absurd, again, to say that the British exceed the French in courage. They have a different kind of courage—cooler, more stubborn, and less likely to be affected through the imagination. The 88th, for example, ran in upon the flank of Merle's battalions without being in the least discouraged by the fact that they were attacking a number nearly three times as great as their own. But the French suffered the disadvantage of being without the

assistance of their artillery; they were breathless and disordered by their climb. The fight on the crest in each case was a duel betwixt the line and the column; and if the French had the advantage in mass, the British had a deadly advantage in the extent of their front, and, as a consequence, of their fire. In each case, too, the British attacked exactly at the psychological moment. When the French had gained the summit, exhausted, and broken in order, by their climb, then the sudden appearance, the swift advance, the measured volleys, the bayonet charge of a disciplined line wrecked the column. It was Foy himself, long afterwards—perhaps remembering that desperate fight on the rough edge of Busaco, when he saw his splendid regiments hurled, as if with the stroke of a meteorite, down the long slope by the charge of the 9th—who wrote in words we have already quoted, that, "for a set battle with equal numbers on a limited front the English infantry was better than the French."[1]

The gains of Busaco were clear and great. For one thing the Portuguese regiments, so long and patiently trained by Beresford, stiffened by British discipline, and with a thread of British officers running through them, proved for the first time their fighting value. The losses of the British and Portuguese in the fight were exactly equal, the number killed in each case being 626. To this day

[1] Quoted by Oman, vol. i. p. 116.

in every Portuguese barracks Busaco is remembered with pride; there for the first time soldiers of their race showed themselves fit to stand in battle-line with the British. A small military post is still maintained on the ridge at Busaco, and the flag is hoisted on each anniversary in honour of that far-off victory. At Busaco, too, Masséna was taught for the first time the fighting value of the British soldier and he never forgot the lesson. Though he lay for a month within sight of the lines of Torres Vedras he made no attempt to carry them; and no doubt it was the recollection of seeing his massive columns recoil in disorder down the rough slope of Busaco that prevented him from assaulting those yet more formidable lines round Lisbon. The fight on Busaco saved any fighting at Torres Vedras. The political effect of the fight, it may be added, was great. It gave new courage to public opinion both in Great Britain and Portugal.

CHAPTER XI

THE LINES OF TORRES VEDRAS

"I am in a situation in which no mischief can be done to the army, or to any part of it; I am prepared for all events; and if I am in a scrape, as appears to be the general belief in England, although certainly not my own, I'll get out of it."—WELLESLEY.

MASSÉNA attempted no second attack on Wellington's position. All through the afternoon, until dark fell, there was a splutter of skirmishing betwixt the British and French outposts; and, early on the morning of the 28th, Masséna's cavalry was doing what it ought to have done two days earlier—exploring both flanks of the Busaco range to discover whether it might not be turned. A comparatively easy road was found past its northern end, running by Boialvo, and opening an easy approach to Coimbra. On the afternoon of the 28th the French skirmishers were active again on the foot of the ridge, but Wellington's keen eye saw that the French were busy digging trenches along their front and flanks, while heavy columns from the French rear were moving eastward. Masséna was turning the British position, and Loison, with the rear-guard, was standing fast,

while the main body marched away. Wellington might have fallen on the French rear-guard, or have struck at the columns moving past his flank, but either course had its perils, and might wreck his whole strategy—his stand against Masséna behind the great lines of Torres Vedras, where the French would find famine to be their deadliest foe. Wellington would not run the risk of making his great hill-fortress outside Lisbon useless, by risking an unnecessary battle before he reached it.

Wellington accordingly resumed his retreat, and Masséna pushed on without check to Coimbra. It was a city of 40,000 people, and when, on the night of the 28th, news came that Wellington was abandoning Busaco, and that in three days the French advance-guard would reach the city, there were still 30,000 people in the streets. The flight from that city was one of the most picturesque, if tragical, scenes in the war. The roads leading to Lisbon were crowded for miles with flying multitudes, most of them women and children. To the hungry and footsore French regiments, when they reached the city, the spectacle of a great town, empty, indeed, of inhabitants, but with every door open, and rich in every kind of supply, was irresistible, and the leading brigades dissolved, almost in a moment, into plundering, lawless crowds. Discipline vanished; the privates threatened to shoot their officers, who attempted to restrain them. Junot's corps is said

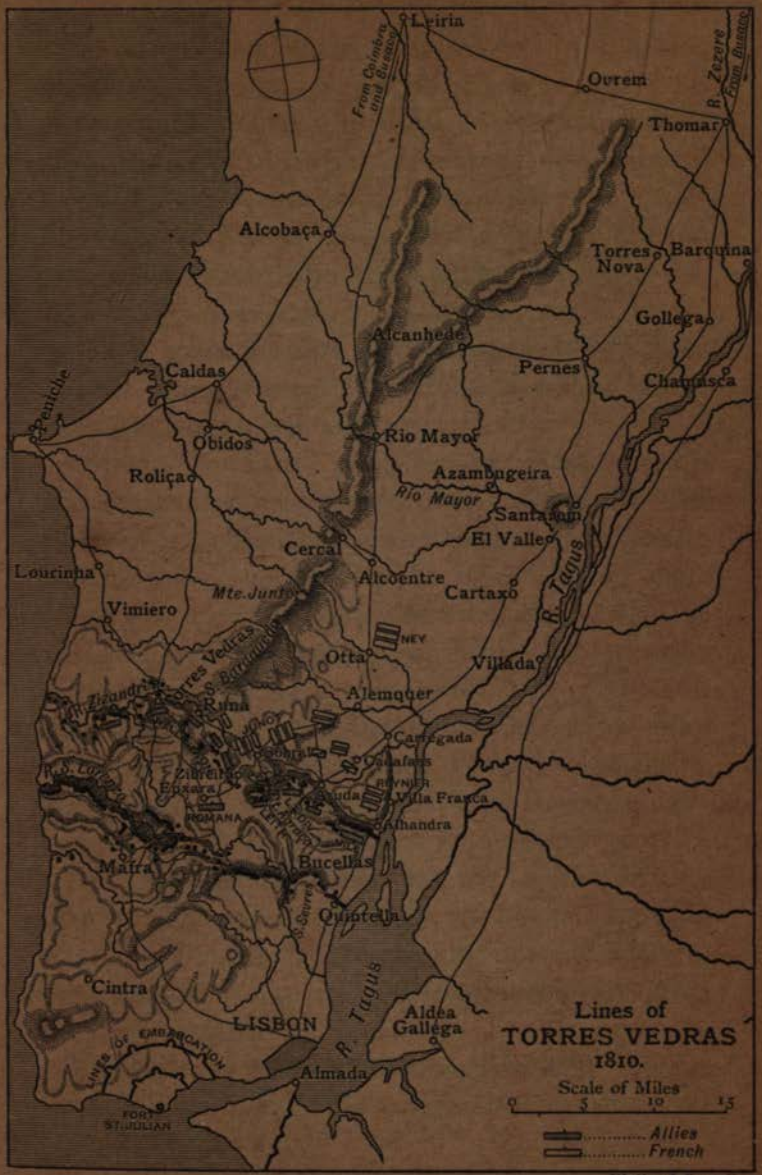
to have destroyed in four hours supplies which would have maintained the whole army for almost as many weeks.

Coimbra was, for the French, a temptation and a trap. It was not till October 2 that Masséna began his pursuit of the British again. He retained Coimbra as a kind of base, left there his wounded from Busaco, and the baggage and guns he could not take with him. On the 7th, four days after Masséna had marched, Trant, the most enterprising of all Wellington's officers in command of the Portuguese, "rushed" Coimbra, capturing more than 4500 prisoners, most of them wounded men, with the whole of Masséna's hospitals and baggage, greatly to the wrath of his whole army, and to the unmeasured fury of Napoleon himself.

Meanwhile, with a constant succession of cavalry skirmishes, Masséna's columns had pressed on Wellington's rear, till on October 10 the last files of Craufurd's division, which formed his rear-guard, disappeared from the sight of the pursuing French, behind a fold of the great hill range. On the following morning Montbrun, who commanded Masséna's cavalry, came in sight of a long scarped hillside, pricked with redoubts and strongly held, which forbade further advance. He sent back word to Masséna that he had come upon a vast line of fortifications, running from the bank of the Tagus westward; and this was the first hint the French

got of the famous lines of Torres Vedras. Not till October 14 did Masséna himself come up to stare at the barrier which checked him at the very moment he believed Lisbon to be in his grasp. His most trusted officer, Pelet, tells the story of how, instead of a landscape of gently rolling hills, they saw mountains hewn into vast fortifications, deep ravines thick with abattis, a road passage only a few paces broad and commanded by heavy batteries on front and flank.

The famous lines might almost be described as the most formidable defensive position known in the history of war. Wellington, with his foreseeing genius, had planned them a year before. When he landed in the Peninsula in April, 1809, he realised at once the need for some stronghold, within touch of his ships, which might be held against the utmost force that could be brought against it. Such a stronghold must be drawn round Lisbon; and the geographical position of the city gave Wellington exactly the opportunity he wanted. Lisbon stands on a point of land betwixt the Atlantic and a vast tidal estuary, and so is, in fact, a peninsula. A few miles to the north is a triple line of hills stretching from the sea to the estuary. On October 20, 1809, Wellington wrote a memorable despatch to Colonel Fletcher, chief of his engineering staff, directing him to prepare a scheme for constructing on these hills a double line of


Leiria
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R. Zezere
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Alcobaça
Torres Nova
Barquina
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Pernes
Chamusca
Caldas
Peniche
Obidos
Rio Mayor
Roliça
Azambugeira
Rio Mayor
Santarem
El Valle
Cercal
Lourinha
Alcoentre
Cartaxo
R. Tagus
Mte. Junto
Vimiero
Villada
Otta
Alemquer
Runa
Camarida
Ribamalaga
Villa Franca
Athandra
Bucellas
Mafra
Quintella
Cintra
LISBON
Aldea Gallega
Almada
FORT ST. JULIAN
Lines of
TORRES VEDRAS
1810.
Scale of Miles
0 5 10 15
Allies
French
Walker & Boutall sc.

trenches and redoubts stretching from water to water. There was to be an inner line—the citadel of the whole scheme of defence—an entrenched camp designed to cover an embarkation, if this were found to be necessary. Twenty-four miles to the north of Lisbon stretched the second line of defence; the outer line was originally intended as an outwork, to hold an advancing enemy in check while the main position was taken up, but this, in time, was strengthened till it became well-nigh impregnable, and so was held permanently.

"The famous lines," says Professor Oman, "were one of the cheapest investments in history." The engineering staff employed numbered only eighteen; the labour was supplied by the Lisbon militia regiments who received fourpence a day extra for their services, by hired peasantry, from 5000 to 7000 in number, who were paid a shilling a day, and later by conscription of the whole district for forty miles around. The peasantry worked in gangs of from 1000 to 1500 men, each in charge of an engineering officer, and under a total staff of overseers consisting of about 150 non-commissioned officers. The cost of the work was about £100,000; and for this modest sum some fifty miles of fortifications, including 150 forts, manned with 600 guns, had been created.

The defences were of every possible kind. Rivers were dammed, and the approaches to the foot-

hills for miles were turned into impassable swamps. The narrow ravines were choked with abattis; across one great ravine a loose stone wall, sixteen feet thick and forty feet high, was raised. Along the summit of one hill for a space of three miles stone walls, six feet high and four feet in thickness, were piled. At one point the hill front was scarped for two thousand yards so as to make a precipice which could not be climbed. In general plan the lines consisted of closed earthworks dotted along the two ranges of hills. At certain points the earthworks expanded to the scale of fortified camps, and the whole was knitted together with every kind of defence. The earthworks were so related to each other that the whole front was swept by a cross-fire, and all the approaches to the outer line had been denuded of cover till it was clear as a glacis. Altogether fifty-three miles of defences were constructed, and the whole was linked together so perfectly that a message could be sent along the whole front in seven minutes. "Rome," says Napier in his emphatic way, "never raised greater works in the time."

The works themselves, it is to be noted, had their own garrison, composed of some 20,000 men of what may be called the second line—Portuguese gunners, picked companies of Portuguese militia, 2000 British marines, &c., with some 8000 Spanish troops brought up by Romana. This left Wellington's field army, by this time 60,000 strong, drawn

up at advantageous points within the lines, and ready to strike at any of Masséna's columns that broke their way through. Wellington knew the value of the sea as a base. His troops, comfortably housed, drew ample supplies from the fleet lying off Lisbon. "With the sea open to me," he wrote, "and tonnage enough in the Tagus I can never be in danger. Every day that we can manage to hold our own in this country is an immense gain to us and a great loss to the enemy. . . . The first serious check which Bonaparte meets with will give the signal for a general rising against him."

It is curious, however, to know that Wellington himself believed that the one serious peril to the lines came from the sea. "The only real danger to me was from the sea; and I have often wondered that Bonaparte did not make a desperate effort to gain the command of the estuary of the Tagus. There were, to be sure, nine chances to one against his succeeding. But the game which he played was worth risking even these odds to win. If by a sudden burst he could have got possession of the Tagus, and kept it for a week, we must have starved. However, I had pretty well provided against that also. We had heavy batteries which commanded the roadstead; and Belem and the other forts were well armed." And this five years after Trafalgar!

Masséna studied long and with angry eyes the great lines of fortified hills that barred his approach to Lisbon. Then he turned with fury upon his Portuguese advisers. "You told me," he said, "that I should find the country easy as far as Lisbon, and look!" "Ah," they replied, "it is that devil of a man who has placed his batteries everywhere." "But," said Masséna, "that devil of a man did not create the mountains." "No," they admitted, "but he has turned the mountains into fortresses."

Masséna was too good a captain to wreck his army by flinging it upon such a formidable position. But if he was too wary to attack, he was of too stubborn a temper to retire; and for a month he lay sullenly in front of Wellington's lines, sending his cavalry far out, meanwhile, in search of supplies. That in a district which Wellington believed had been swept clear of food, he succeeded in keeping an army of 60,000 alive for a whole month, is an amazing proof of his obstinacy, and of the plundering capacity of his troops.

But Masséna paid a tragical price for that month's sullen watch before the scarped and embattled hills that arrested his march on Lisbon. The weather was bitter; his hospitals were crowded; his dead multiplied; discipline was fatally relaxed; a constant stream of deserters flowed into the British lines. It seemed during those distressful weeks as

if the proud and gallant army which Masséna had led across the Spanish frontier would perish of mere famine. And the French spread suffering, as well as endured it. Their foraging parties, pricked with hunger, did incredibly cruel things amongst the unhappy peasantry. "The scenes of misery in the country ravaged by the French," says Tomkinson of the 16th Light Dragoons, in his "Diary of a Cavalry Officer," "are beyond anything I ever saw, and if the enemy continue long in their present position, half the people of the country will be in their graves."

Wellington had his own troubles, but his army, in sheltered cantonments, and drawing abundant supplies from the transports lying in port, was under very cheerful conditions, and he was able to watch the French camps with stern satisfaction. He knew how suffering was wasting Masséna's strength. "Every day they stop there," he wrote, "is a gain to us."

The "Cavalry Officer" above quoted gives a curiously interesting picture of life and adventure on the British outposts during those stern days. All the desertions, it seems, were not from the French camps into the British lines; in some inexplicable fashion there was a tiny trickle of runaways from the British regiments to the French. "Since we have been in the lines," he writes, "many of our infantry have passed over; seven from the Fusiliers

went off in one night, and these from one of the best regiments in the service." But he has more cheerful incidents to relate. A perpetual skirmishing went on betwixt the British cavalry piquets and the scattered detachments of hungry French searching the country for food, and in the hurly burly of personal combats the British established a complete mastery. "The spirit of capturing and attacking the enemy's parties," Tomkinson writes, "is very great, and the only fear is not falling in with them, the men not regarding their numbers. A sergeant and two dragoons to-day took eighteen infantry."

Here are some examples of the exploits of the British cavalry piquets still worth recording:—

"Sergeant Liddle of Cocks' squadron was sent from Alquentre with four men on patrol round by Rio Mayor. He fell in with an officer and fifteen French infantry and attacked them, when they all surrendered. Sergeant Baxter was sent on patrol from the brigade with four men to the left. He met with an infantry piquet of the enemy's, stationed in a house with their arms piled in front, and got so near unobserved that he thought he might get to the arms before they could take them up. He galloped forward; they had time to turn out, and gave him a volley, wounding one of his men. It was too late to turn back; he persisted in his charge, rode up to the enemy, who laid down their arms, he killing one man. In all, forty-one men and an officer, which number he marched in. Sergeant Nichols, of Captain Cocks' troop, took sixteen infantry with six men, on the right—though I think they were glad to find an English party to save them from the peasantry."

Meanwhile Wellington himself was beset with

exasperating difficulties. His strategy was not even yet understood by the Cabinet he represented, and public opinion in England had fallen into a despairing mood. "Nobody could believe," says Gleig, "that a handful of men, forced into a corner within twenty miles of Lisbon, would be able many days to hold its ground against the united strength of the French empire." It was at the very moment, indeed, when Wellington's profound and masterly policy had arrested Masséna's advance, and the fortunes of the campaign had reached their turning-point, that Lord Liverpool wrote to a correspondent telling him that "the re-embarkation of the army would probably begin about September."

The Portuguese understood Wellington's strategy no better than the English Prime Minister. They were naturally disquieted by the long retreat of Wellington. It suggested another Corunna. The presence, too, of a great army under a formidable captain like Masséna, within twenty-five miles of Lisbon, seemed a menace of overwhelming significance. The policy of sweeping the districts through which the French must pass of all supplies, though it had been carried out so imperfectly as partially to fail in its effect on the enemy, disordered Portuguese finances, and gave the authorities a pretext, if not a justification, for abandoning the first duties of government. The pay and supplies of the Portuguese army failed, and failed so persistently, and with such disastrous

effects, that in six months the Portuguese battalions lost 4000 by death, 4000 by discharges, and no less than 10,000 by desertion. Some of the leading men in Portuguese affairs, notably Principal Souza, vexed Wellington almost beyond endurance with perpetual intrigues. They obstructed his plans, betrayed his correspondence, encouraged disobedience to his orders, and spread the report that he was about to abandon the country. His strategy was assailed; they devised an insane substitute for it, and clamoured for it to be carried out, till at last even Wellington's patience gave way. In the whole of his correspondence there is perhaps nothing which shows more clearly how great was the strain upon him, and how nearly he had reached the limits of endurance, than some of his letters at this period.

In one to M. Forjas, dated September 7, 1810, he says:

"In order to put an end at once to these miserable intrigues I beg that you will inform the Government that I will not stay in the country, that I will advise the King's Government to withdraw the assistance which His Majesty affords us"—if, in a word, certain practices are not dropped.

He writes a month later:

"Do me the favour to inform the Regency, and above all, the Principal Souza, that . . . I will not suffer them, nor anybody else to interfere with the conduct of military operations. . . . I am responsible for what I do and they are not. As for Principal Souza, I beg you to tell him, from me, that I have had no satisfaction in transacting the business of this country since he has been a member of the Government; that, being

embarked in a course of military operations, of which I hope to see the successful termination, I shall continue to carry them on to the end; but that no power on earth shall induce me to remain in the Peninsula for one moment after I shall have obtained His Majesty's leave to resign my charge, if Principal Souza is to remain either a member of the Government or to continue at Lisbon. Either he must quit the country or I will: and, if I should be obliged to go, I shall take care that the world, or Portugal at least, and the Prince Regent, shall be made acquainted with my reasons."[1]

Now Principal Souza was, after all, an insignificant person. He could irritate, no doubt, like a mosquito; but he was only a mosquito. And that Wellington should in this way put himself, and the British army, and a great policy on which hung the future, not only of Great Britain, but of Europe, in the scales against "Principal Souza," is a proof that he had his share of the weakness of human nature. There were points at which even his patience, cold as ice and hard as steel, gave way. And with him, as with smaller men, anger disordered his vision; he no longer saw the relative sizes of things.

Wellington, it may be added, who was too good a soldier not to understand the vulnerable points in his own position, was disquieted by Soult's operations on the other side of the Tagus. Soult's performances amongst the Spanish divisions on whom he fell resembled those of a lean and hunger-bitten leopard amongst a number of fat sheep. In fifty days he captured four fortresses, invested a fifth, killed

[1] "Despatches," vol. vi. p. 93.

or dispersed 10,000 men, and made 20,000 prisoners. A little later, and by a very shameless act of treachery on the part of the Spanish commander, he captured Badajos, and thus robbed the British of their one strong place of arms on the Spanish frontier. To undo that infamous act of a Spanish general the British forces had later to pay the price of the awful slaughter of Albuera, and all the furious bloodshed of the storming of Badajos on the night of April 6, 1812.

It must be remembered that, in addition to the actual business of war—the task of maintaining the efficiency and directing the movements of his own troops, and watching the tactics of his opponents—there fell upon Wellington a daily burden of work, political, diplomatic, and financial, sufficient to tax to the breaking-point the nerves and brain of any one not endowed with an almost miraculous capacity for sustained industry. He had at once to conduct a campaign, regulate the affairs of a kingdom, match his wits against commanders trained in Napoleon's school, control an army made up of troops of three nations, soothe Spanish suspicions, hush Portuguese disquiets, and satisfy the demands of a Cabinet in England. He could not have done this if he had not possessed a body almost incapable of fatigue, and an industry swift, methodised, concentrated, in a degree almost without precedent.

He possessed in a singular degree the power of

concentrating his whole mind on an unending succession of wholly unlike subjects. Lord Morley has said that hard work consists in saying "Yes" and "No" in quick succession to an indefinite number of questions; and Wellington had to be saying "Yes" and "No" through all his waking hours to questions coming, in three or four different languages, from every quarter of the compass, and on which hung almost greater issues than life and death. The fate of a campaign, or even of a nation, hung upon them. He had the useful faculty of being able to do with less sleep than most men, and the still more useful faculty of being able to sleep at will. His skill in husbanding time amounted to genius.

Gleig, who had close personal knowledge of his habits, thus describes Wellington's methods: "He rose early, wrote letters and despatches till breakfast-time; saw the heads of departments then, and arranged with them the details of the day; then, returning to his bedroom, continued his general correspondence till two in the afternoon. Unless very hard-pressed with business, he would then get upon horseback, and ride to the outposts, or wherever else he conceived that his presence might be necessary. At six he dined—almost always with guests more or less numerous round him; and at nine, or thereabouts, usually withdrew again to his own room. There he continued at his desk till midnight, discussing all that variety of topics which gives its

peculiar interest to his public correspondence; and having done this, he slept." And he slept, it may be added, with the deep, undistressed slumber of a child.

In the meanwhile the lines of Torres Vedras were profoundly, and in a degree unrealised at the moment by Wellington himself, affecting Napoleon's whole policy in Spain. They may even be said to have saved the crown of King Joseph, an end, certainly, never contemplated by Wellington and his engineers. On October 12, 1810, Napoleon wrote a despatch announcing his resolve to unite Biscay, Navarre, Aragon north of the Ebro, and Catalonia—the whole left bank of the Ebro, in a word—to France; Portugal, by way of compensation, was to be made a Spanish province. A month later he wrote that all this was to take effect only "when the French army had entered Lisbon, and the English had taken to their ships"; in the meanwhile the scheme was to be kept profoundly secret. But King Joseph declared he would abdicate if this policy was carried out; the stubborn British declined to "take to their ships"; the lines of Torres Vedras remained not only uncaptured, but unassailed; and so Napoleon's designs remained unannounced. "It was the lines of Torres Vedras," says Professor Oman, "which saved King Joseph from abdication and Spain from dismemberment."

CHAPTER XII

MASSÉNA'S RETREAT

"'Ah,' said Masséna when he met Wellington afterwards at Paris, 'you have made me pass some bad moments.' 'He declared to me,' said Wellington, 'that I had not left him one black hair on his body; he had turned grey, he said, all over. I answered that I thought we had been pretty even. . . . 'No,' he said, 'how near you were to taking me sometimes'—which I was."—STANHOPE.

MASSÉNA clung with heroic stubbornness to the front of Wellington's lines for a month, but by November 10 his hospitals, and the wrecks of his transport train, were falling back. On the night of the 14th his columns were in movement. His peril was that Wellington might strike at his rear-guard and crush it, and the disposition of his forces made that peril deadly. Junot's corps was thrust forward, like the point of a spear, into Wellington's front, and he might have been attacked on either flank and destroyed. But Masséna's genius shone in moments of peril. "If," says Napier, "he committed errors early in the campaign he now proved himself a daring, able, and pertinacious commander. He awoke, and made war like a great man, more formidable with reduced means, and in

difficulties, than he had been when opportunity was rife and numbers untouched.[1]

A piece of singular good luck marked the beginning of the French retreat. A fog crept up from the marshes, or blew in from the sea, and lay over all the roads by which Masséna's columns had to move. He placed dragoons at every cross-road to keep his infantry from wandering, and the British outposts, though broken sounds as of a moving host came through the fog, could see nothing, and suspected nothing. At ten o'clock on the morning of the 15th the fog suddenly lifted, and then the British outposts discovered that the familiar French piquets had vanished. In the front of the Light Division the French had stretched a line of dummy sentinels, men of straw, topped with old shakos; and, seen from a little distance, the deception was perfect until it was noticed that these "sentries" never moved.

Masséna had tricked Wellington, and he fell back in something of the mood of an angry bear, ready to turn upon his pursuers, until he reached Santarem, a mountainous ridge stretching for some three miles at right angles to the Tagus, with a lower range of hills in front, looking on an expanse of level country, turned by the winter rains into a marsh. The only approach to the French lines was by a narrow causeway, running like a thread

[1] Napier, vol. iii. p. 72.

across the swamp, and barred at the further end with heavy batteries of guns. It was a most formidable post. Wellington, pursuing late and slowly, found when he reached the French position, that Masséna had turned his own policy against him; he had practically set in his path a miniature version of the lines of Torres Vedras!

The position of the two armies was thus reversed; Wellington had to be the assailant, and Masséna was unassailable. In his new position, too, Masséna escaped the look of defeat. He still seemed to threaten Lisbon, though it was with nothing better than a phantom siege. He was able to draw supplies from a wider area, and from districts less exhausted by the ravages of his own columns, and he confronted Wellington in a position difficult to turn and dangerous to attack. "When he was in front of Torres Vedras," said Wellington of Masséna long afterwards, "I always found him where I did not wish to find him." That was certainly true of Masséna at Santarem.

Wellington, however, wisely refused to attack. "I have no doubt," he wrote, ". . . that I am strong enough to beat the French, but by exposing my troops at this inclement season to the rains of even three days and nights I am sure to bring sickness amongst them." This policy, no doubt, disappointed the impatient spirits in the British army, and it made yet more furiously discon-

tented the Portuguese authorities. "But it may be shown," says Napier, "that both generals"—Masséna in taking up his new position, and Wellington in refusing to attack it—"acted wisely and like great captains."

As to Masséna's wisdom, however, in holding on, even at Santarem, Wellington doubted. He wrote to Lord Liverpool on November 26: "I am convinced that there is no man in his senses who has ever passed a winter in Portugal who would not recommend them to go now, rather than to endeavour to maintain themselves upon the Zezere during the winter." But Masséna was of too stubborn a genius to be persuaded—even by the argument of crowded hospitals and dwindling regiments—to fall back from a position which he believed he could hold against the British; and which, while he held it, kept both the hopes, and the whole plan, of his campaign alive.

While standing at bay at Santarem, Masséna, whose communications had long been uncertain, despatched Foy, an adroit and daring soldier, with a battalion of good infantry and some cavalry to carry despatches to Paris. With great difficulty and through many perils Foy found his way across Spain, gave the news to such French corps as he touched of Masséna's position, with orders to march and reinforce him, and reached Paris on November 21. Napoleon put him through the

alembic of a fierce cross-examination, striding meanwhile up and down his study.

"Why the devil did Masséna thrust himself into that muddle at Busaco? Even in a plain country columns do not break through lines, unless they are supported by a superior artillery fire. And the disgrace at Coimbra, where he has let his hospitals be taken by 1500 ragged rascals! To lose your hospitals is as disgraceful as to lose your flags! In a regularly organised country — England, for example — Masséna would have gone to the scaffold for that job. The English are full of courage and honour: they defend themselves well. Masséna and Ney did not know them, but Reynier, whom they had beaten twice or thrice (Alexandria and Maida), ought to know them! Wellington has behaved like a clever man; his total desolation of the kingdom of Portugal is the result of systematic measures splendidly concerted. I could not do that myself, for all my power. Why did not Masséna stop at Coimbra, after Busaco?" "Because," faltered Foy, "supposing he had done so, your Majesty would have reproached him by saying, 'If you had only pushed straight on Lisbon the English would have embarked.'" "Very possible, indeed," replied the Emperor, breaking into a broad smile. "Well, I wanted to drive them into the sea; I have failed. All right; then I will have a regular campaign in Portugal and use them up. I can wear them down in the nature of things, because England cannot compete in mere numbers with me."

Napoleon added a naive confession that his Spanish arithmetic was hopelessly wrong; "but for all that," he added, "I don't repent of what I did; I had to smash up that nation, sooner or later they would have done me a bad turn." His shrewd genius approved of Masséna's stand at Santarem. "As long as Masséna stays in position opposite Lisbon nothing is lost; he is still a terror

to the English, and keeps the offensive. If he retreats I fear great disaster for him." He concluded by saying, "All the hope of the English is in that army of Wellington's. If we could destroy it it would be a terrible blow to them." But neither the genius of Napoleon nor all the courage of his armies availed to "destroy" that army.

Masséna clung to his lines on the inclement hills at Santarem from November 1810 till March 1811. He maintained his army, that is, for nearly six months in a country supposed to be incapable of sustaining it for fifteen days; a striking evidence of his obstinate genius. By the end of February, however, his position was no longer tenable. Soult showed no sign of either joining him, or of compelling Wellington to fall back, by striking at his communications with Lisbon. But Masséna clung to his hunger-bitten camp at Santarem till his army was almost at the point of dissolution. Half his guns had to be abandoned for lack of horses; his haggard battalions had fallen almost to the mood, and condition, of brigands as the result of their incessant expeditions in search of food. A French army, however, has great rallying power, and Masséna's stern energy restored discipline as soon as his columns were on the march. Yet, late as Masséna moved, he missed a great opportunity by moving too soon. Had

he held on at Santarem only ten days longer, Soult would have fallen in with his strategy, and struck at Lisbon through the Alemtejo, arresting Wellington's pursuit and compelling him to fall back for the defence of the Portuguese capital.

Masséna's immediate object, when he began the second stage of his retreat, was to take up a position beyond the Mondego, seize Coimbra, and so secure the high road to Oporto, and the line of the Douro. Beyond this there was the dream of great reinforcements, which would raise his force again to 70,000 men, and a new advance against Lisbon, but this time by both banks of the Tagus. To escape from Santarem he had to make a flank march, with all his sick and baggage, across the front of Wellington, and he effected this with fine skill. He destroyed much of his ammunition and baggage, disabled the guns he could not carry off, and secretly moved his sick and baggage towards Thomar. Then Ney, with the 6th Corps and a strong cavalry force, suddenly took up a position near Peiria, as if threatening a new advance upon Torres Vedras, and while Wellington was standing on guard against this stroke, Masséna's columns, on the night of the 5th, followed the sick and baggage on the road to Thomar, destroying the bridges on the streams behind them. Loison and Reynier moved on converging lines towards the same point, and the Mondego was gained with a four days' start of

Wellington. Masséna, at the end of a period so trying, carried off his wasted force with a consummate skill which proved how great a captain he was.

But Wellington had learned some lessons in his own long retreat on Lisbon, and he now turned them against the French. He was, if not in a more daring mood, yet under conditions which made a more daring strategy possible. His army was eager for action; the sense of success ran like wine in its blood; it had been reinforced; the state of the weather made marching easy; and Wellington pushed his columns forward, resolutely, and at speed, thrusting Masséna's right wing back by persistent flank marches. The country was full of strong positions; "every village," says Napier, "was a defile." Ney held Masséna's rear-guard, a post which exactly suited his genius as a soldier. But Wellington never missed his thrust. He constantly out-marched the French, and threatened the passes in their rear; and position after position had to be abandoned.

Masséna found that Coimbra was out of his reach. He was pushed back with such energy and skill that he could make no stand behind the Alva. For three weeks after he began his retreat from Santarem, he could make no stand, till he reached Celorico, and still about that town were the camps from which, in September 1810, he had set his invading army in movement down the Mondego on their

march to Lisbon. That Wellington could thus continually dislodge an army of French veterans, with Masséna to shape its strategy, and Ney to command its rear-guard, was a fine proof of his genius in war. He had under him at last, as he himself claimed, "an army that could manœuvre."

It may be added that as the British followed on the track of the retreating French they found the whole country scribbled over with characters of suffering and ruin. Masséna's foraging columns were ruthless. Here is a single incident described by Napier:—

"In an obscure place among the hills, a large house was discovered filled with starving persons. Above thirty women and children were already dead, and sitting by the bodies were fifteen or sixteen living beings, of whom only one was a man, and all so enfeebled as to be unable to swallow the little food that could be offered to them. The youngest had fallen first, all the children were dead, none were emaciated, but the muscles of their faces were invariably drawn transversely, giving a laughing appearance unimaginably ghastly. The man seemed most eager for life, the women patient and resigned, and they had carefully covered and arranged the bodies of the dead!"[1]

That dreadful picture, looked at even in the long perspective of a century, can still thrill the heart with pity.

The retreat was marked by some bloody combats. On the 10th Massena crossed the Sovre by the bridge of Pombal, Ney holding the bridge. But the riflemen of the Light Division, by a daring charge,

[1] Napier, vol. iii. p. 113.

carried the bridge, and drove the French from the castle and town with such fire that Masséna was compelled to continue his retreat all night. On the 12th Ney checked the pursuing British with a fine stroke of soldiership. He had the village of Redinha. The position was difficult. There was a narrow bridge, a long defile commanded by some rugged heights, and Ney had so disposed his rear-guard that a fight seemed certain, and the French were in strength. Wellington held back his stroke till his main body came up, then launched a formidable attack. His preparations were completed.

"Three cannon shots were fired from the British centre as a signal, and a splendid spectacle was presented. The woods on the flanks seemed alive with troops, and thirty thousand infantry were stretched in three lines of battle across the plain bending in a gentle curve, and moving onwards while the horsemen and guns, springing forward simultaneously from two points, charged under a general volley from the French, who were instantly shrouded in smoke: when that cleared away no enemy was to be seen. For Ney, while keenly watching the progress of this magnificent formation, had opposed Picton's foremost skirmishers with his left, and covered by their fire, had withdrawn the rest of his people, with such rapidity as to gain the village before even the cavalry could touch them."[1]

The village was in flames, but a dismounted howitzer had been left in one of its streets. Ney knew the importance of keeping the spirit of his regiments high at the beginning of a new stage in a long retreat. He turned, and in person charged through the burning streets and carried off that

[1] Napier, vol. iii. p. 116.

worthless bit of iron. The British guns were thundering on him; the Light Dragoons of the 3rd Division, "chasing like heated bloodhounds," with their prey in sight, were over the river almost as soon as the French, but Ney escaped, and his gallant stroke kindled the courage of his battalions to a yet more daring temper.

At Casal Noval the too eager British narrowly escaped disaster. Craufurd had gone to England on leave, and Erskine, almost the most unfit man in the army to command such hard-fighting regiments, was in charge of the Light Division. Sir Harry Smith in his autobiography calls him bluntly "a short-sighted old ass." George Napier describes him as "the laughing-stock of the army." Wellington, when he knew Erskine was appointed to the Light Division, wrote to Colonel Torrens, military secretary, with undiplomatic bluntness; "I have received your letter announcing the appointment of Erskine . . . and . . . to his army. The first I have generally understood to be a madman; I believe it is your own opinion that the second is not very wise; the third, I believe, will be a useful man." [1] Wellington had set in movement an elaborate combination for a crushing stroke at the French. Picton was to turn their left flank; Cole was to attack Reynier when the turning movement had taken effect; the main body was to strike. But Erskine, at an early hour,

[1] "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vi. p. 552.

heard through the mist which lay on his front the dull sounds of a moving multitude, concluded the whole French army was in retreat, and sent the 52nd forward in a hurry and without an advance-guard.

In the perplexity of the mist the regiment passed the French outposts; the rest of the Light Division was following. Suddenly a roar of musketry and the deep thunder of heavy guns broke out. The fog lifted and the 52nd was seen on the slope of the hill, and engaged without support in the midst of Ney's corps, and shut round in a circle of musketry fire. Charles Napier says the regiment looked "like a red pimple on the face of the country which was black with French masses." The Light Division had to extend its skirmishing front to correspond with Ney's attack, and the French were so enormously superior in numbers that the whole of the division was drawn out in one thin irregular thread, sharply attacked at every point, and Picton had to send the 60th Rifles to extend their front.

The French kept up a close and deadly fire, but the obstinate British line, though often bent back, could not be torn. In desperately fighting clusters the files kept touch with each other. Cole and Picton were now pressing into the fight on the French left; other British divisions were coming up with cavalry and guns; and Ney, covering his rear with a cloud of light troops and horse artillery, fell

back, fighting ridge after ridge. The pursuit quickened, the fight grew closer, and Ney's order was roughly broken, till he reached the strong position of Miranda de Corvo, which Masséna held with his main body.

William Napier, with some companies of the 43rd, gives a picturesque account of the struggle, and shows it to have been so fierce that even some of the famous 43rd shrank from following their leaders.

"With two companies I suddenly found myself in the midst of the enemy, but I arrived just in time to save Captain Dobbs of the 52nd, and two men who were cut off from their regiment. The French were gathering fast about us, we could scarcely retreat, and Dobbs agreed with me that boldness would be our best chance; so we called upon the men to follow, and, jumping over a wall which had given us cover, charged the enemy with a shout which sent the nearest back. But then occurred the most painful event that ever happened to me. Only the two men of the 52nd followed us, and we four arrived unsupported at a second wall, close to a considerable body of French, who rallied and began to close upon us. Their fire was very violent, but the wall gave cover. I was, however, stung by the backwardness of my men, and told Dobbs I would save him, or lose my life, by bringing up the two companies; he entreated me not, saying I could not make two paces from the wall and live. Yet I did go back to the first wall, escaped the fire, and, reproaching the men, gave them the word again, and returned to Dobbs, who was now upon the point of being taken; but again I returned alone! The soldiers had indeed crossed the wall in their front, but kept edging away to the right to avoid the heavy fire. Being now maddened by this second failure, I made another attempt, but I had not made ten paces when a shot struck my spine, and the enemy very ungenerously continued to fire at me when I was down. I escaped death by dragging myself by my hands—for my lower extremities were

paralyzed—towards a small heap of stones which was in the midst of the field, and thus covering my head and shoulders. Not less than twenty shots struck this heap." [1]

The three Napiers were all of the same heroic temper. In this same fight George Napier had his arm broken by a bullet, while carrying his mortally wounded subaltern off the field, under a heavy fire. And it was after this fight that Charles Napier, in hastening up, with his dreadful Busaco wound unhealed, to the front of the army, met the two litters carrying his brothers, of whom he was informed that William was wounded mortally. This is related in the "Life of Sir Charles Napier," by William Napier himself.

"Combat followed combat, the Light Division led in pursuit, and Charles Napier, with his wound still bandaged, rode above ninety miles on one horse, and in one course, to reach the army. His regiment being with the main body, he heard each morning the ever-recurring sound of the light division's combats in front, and had hourly to ask of the wounded men if his brothers were living? Thus advancing on the 14th March he met a litter of branches, borne by soldiers and covered with a blanket. What wounded officer is that? Captain Napier of the 52nd, a broken limb. Another litter followed. Who is that? Captain Napier of the 43rd, mortally wounded—it was thought so then. Charles Napier looked at them and passed on to the fight in front!"

On the 15th another bitter fight took place at Foz d'Aronce. Night was falling, thick with clouds and rain, and the British advance-guard, weary with a

[1] "Life of Sir W. Napier," pp. 55-6.

long march, halted, and were beginning to light fires, when Wellington rode up. Masséna had destroyed most of his baggage, and pushed on through the defile; Ney, with his usual audacity, barred the road, his force consisting of a brigade of horse, some batteries of guns, and ten or twelve battalions of infantry. Wellington studied Ney's force keenly for a moment, and then struck at him fiercely and suddenly. Picton's division ran at his left, the Light Division charged his right, and some batteries of horse artillery, galloping forward, opened fire on his centre. Ney's battalions were tumbled together, and swept in confusion towards the river. Many missed the narrow fords, and were swept into the deep current. Of the French loss of 500, more than half were drowned, and Ney was taught to dread his opponent's stroke.

On the 16th Wellington halted. He had saved Coimbra, turned his formidable antagonist out of every strong position, and driven him behind the Alva. Wellington knew by this time that Badajos had fallen, thanks to Spanish treachery, and that his right and rear were open. His regiments were worn with fatigue; he had outmarched his supplies; but he was bent on pushing Masséna back still further. He sent three of his divisions over the wild country of the upper Alva, carried the Light Division across that river on improvised rafts, above Marcella; and Masséna had to begin his retreat anew, destroying

part of his remaining baggage and ammunition, and abandoning his foraging parties, of which more than 800 were swept up by Wellington's cavalry. On the 21st, harried and shaken, Masséna reached Celorico, the point from which he had started on his great campaign of invasion.

But his sullen energy still survived. He was stubbornly reluctant to cross the Spanish frontier. This would give a still blacker aspect of retreat and ruin to his whole campaign. He conceived the bold idea of leaving his sick in Almeida, countermarching through Sabugal, getting into touch with Soult, and threatening—or seeming to threaten—an attack on Lisbon from the left bank of the Tagus.

But his authority had been shaken by the long retreat with its many disasters. His generals disputed his commands. Ney, Drouet, Montbrun, Junot, Reynier, were soldiers with the temper of adventurers, and with ambitions of their own; and they were united in a common jealousy of Masséna. Portugal was hateful to them. They were tired of their campaign with famine; the British, they found, had uncomfortable gifts of hard fighting, and there was a touch of generalship in Wellington for which warfare with Spanish armies had spoiled them.

At Miranda the dispute betwixt the French generals grew fierce. Masséna's orders were evaded, or only half obeyed. Ney, of a fiercer spirit than his fellows, bluntly refused to join the march on

Coria, and set his columns in movement in an independent direction. Masséna, however, was a dangerous chief to cross, and Ney was summarily deprived of his command, and left to make a belated and useless appeal to Napoleon, while Loison was put in his place.

On March 22, Masséna attempted to carry out his new and daring policy of moving on Lisbon again by the left bank of the Tagus; but Wellington gave him no opportunity. His stroke was too close and swift. The light division of the cavalry passed the Mondego at Celorico, and three divisions of infantry, with two cavalry regiments, on the 29th, moved across the shoulder of the Guarda hills. Masséna found that his communication with Almeida was broken, and his position untenable. During the next few days two great captains, in difficult country, were smiting at each other, or evading each other's stroke, by swift marches, sudden advances and retreats; but Wellington both out-marched and out-fought his wary opponent.

On April 3, a clever combination to attack and crush Reynier, who held the right of the French position at Sabugal, was spoiled by Erskine. A fog—common at that period of the year in a district so mountainous—lay on the whole scene of action; and Erskine launched the first brigade of his division, under Beckwith, into the fog on a wrong course, and at the wrong time.

Beckwith, as a good soldier, obeyed orders; the river on his front was crossed, four companies of the Rifles climbed the steep hill, thick with wood, the 43rd following. Rain began to fall, it grew heavier every moment; and Beckwith—though he did not know it—with a single battalion, and four companies of Rifles, was attacking Reynier's whole corps of 12,000 infantry, with cavalry and guns. Through fog and rain and forest, made venomous with the fire of French skirmishers, Beckwith struggled to the top of the hill. At that moment the weather cleared. Battalions of the French, thick and black, were on his front, two French howitzers, from a little distance, disputed the crest of the hill with him, and were tearing his scanty ranks with grape, while yet other battalions threatened both flanks. "The company I was leading," says Major Simmons, "pounced upon a column, and came literally within twenty yards of it before we could see it. Guess my astonishment. The most hideous yell assailed my ears, the French drumming, shaking their bayonets, and calling out, 'Vive l'Empereur!'"[1]

Beckwith's single advantage was that, as against the French infantry, he held the summit of the hill, though he shared this advantage with the French guns. "Three columns of the enemy," says Major Simmons, "moved forward with drums beating and the officers dancing like madmen, with

[1] "British Rifleman," p. 176.

their hats frequently hoisted upon their swords. Our men kept up a terrible fire; they went back a little, and we followed. This was done several times."[1] Hopkins, with a flank company of the 43rd, ran out to the right, seized a tiny and rugged eminence close to the French guns, and commanding the path by which the French battalions were advancing to roll up Beckwith's slender line; and three times in succession, with deadly volleys and fierce charges, he broke the head of the climbing French column. By this time two battalions of the 52nd, marching towards the sound of the firing, reached the crest, and came into the British line. "Beckwith," says Napier, "blood streaming from a wound in his head, rode among the skirmishers, praising and exhorting his men in the loud, cheerful tones of a man sure to win his battle." A company of the 52nd captured, by a sudden rush, one of the howitzers, and the hill was cleared once more of the French. The British skirmishers had formed a line behind a low stone wall, and with their fire checked the advance of Reynier's battalions. But a squadron of French dragoons, who had struggled up the hill, rode up to the wall with what Napier calls "incredible daring," and, leaning from their saddles, fired their pistols over it. It was a dangerous manœuvre to try, and especially with the skirmishers of the Light

[1] "British Rifleman," p. 162.

Division. A sharp volley slew nearly every French horseman.

A strong column of French infantry by this time was coming up the face of the hill at the *pas de charge*, with furious beating of drums, their officers leading, determined to retake their guns. These, however, were covered by the fire of the 43rd, and so deadly were their volleys that no French soldier could reach those coveted pieces of iron and live. Reynier had brought into the fight his whole reserve of 6000 infantry, with horse and guns, determined to trample out that tiny cluster of impertinent British, holding the summit of a hill in the very centre of his lines. But the 5th Division were now coming at the double across the bridge of Sabugal. A moving patch of red in the forest on Reynier's right showed that the third division, under Colville, was about to break into the fight, and Reynier hastily fell back, leaving Beckwith with his stubborn infantry in possession both of the howitzers and the hill.

Round these two guns lay 300 dead bodies. In that hour of close and bitter fighting the British lost in killed and wounded some 200 men, the French lost nearly 1500. Wellington described the fight at Sabugal as "one of the most glorious actions British troops were ever engaged in." It certainly was an amazing proof of the fighting quality of the men in the ranks; but, it may be

added, it served to illustrate the stupidity of, at least, some of their generals. Looking back on the whole of the manœuvres betwixt March 16 and April 7, Wellington wrote to a friend: "We have given the French a handsome dressing, and I think they will not again say we are not a manœuvring army. We may not manœuvre so beautifully as they do, but I do not desire better sport than to meet one of their columns *en masse* with one of our lines. The poor second corps received a terrible beating from the 43rd and 52nd on the 3rd"—in the fight at Sabugal.

CHAPTER XIII

FUENTES D'ONORO

"Errors may have been committed—all generals commit errors—but this successful campaign renders him one of the first of his time. I regret that Bonaparte was not here in person."—SIR C. NAPIER.

THE logic of Sabugal was too stern and urgent for Masséna. He was now in full retreat for Ciudad Rodrigo, and on April 15 he crossed the frontier and re-entered Spain. The failure of the great campaign which was to drive the British into the sea was complete. When Masséna began his march on Lisbon he imagined that he had only to meet Wellington in some great pitched battle and overthrow him, and Lisbon would fall. But Wellington evaded his stroke. The country through which he passed was empty both of inhabitants and food; his enemy was invisible and impalpable. Instead of having to overthrow an army, he had to fight a famine. And Masséna found, as other captains in Spain have found, that hunger is a more deadly enemy than batteries of guns or lines of charging infantry.

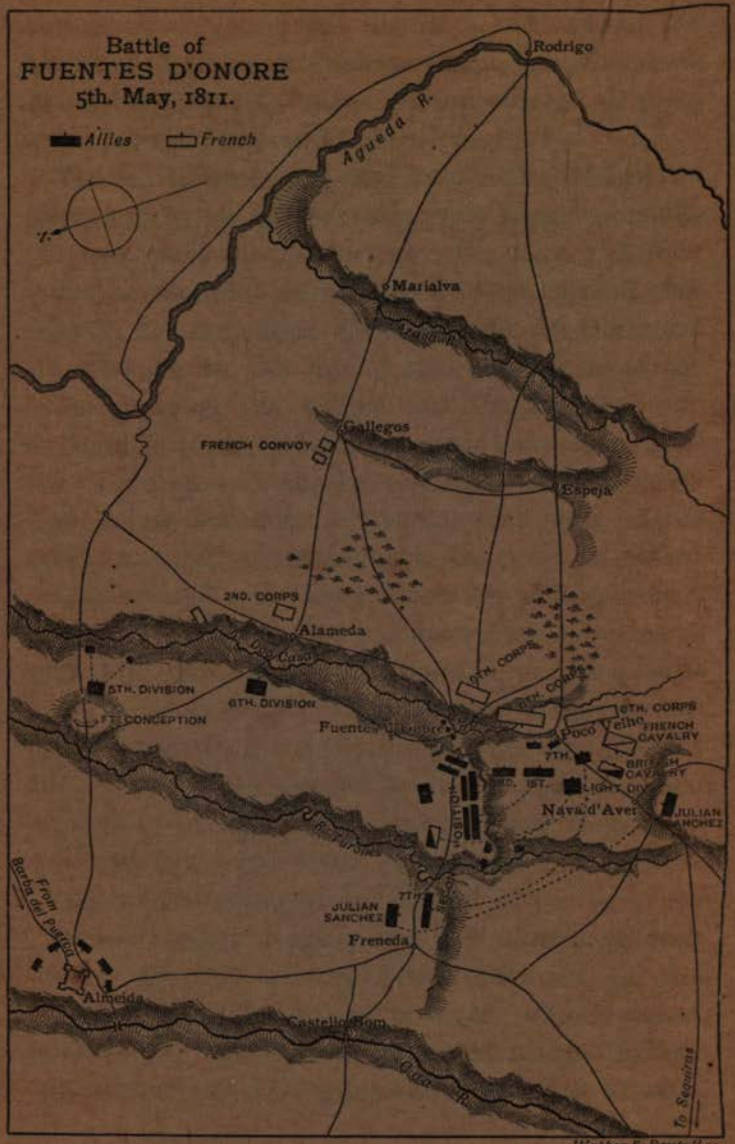
Masséna had entered Portugal with an army

65,000 strong; at Santarem reinforcement to the number of 10,000 had joined him. During his seven months' invasion of Portugal he had fought only one battle, that of Busaco; the rest of the actual fighting consisting of a succession of petty combats all save one—that at Sabugal—of minor importance. Yet it was with a sorely wasted army of 45,000, with half its guns and nearly all its baggage lost, that Masséna re-crossed the Spanish frontier. The march on Lisbon had cost the French 30,000 men. Wellington's Fabian policy was triumphant. And the result of the campaign of 1810 was more than the defeat of a single army. It broke, finally, the offensive power of the French armies in Spain. When Masséna's troops turned their backs on Torres Vedras, they began a retreat which practically ended at Waterloo.

Masséna now fell back to Salamanca, to re-equip his army and to wait for reinforcements. Wellington, on his part, was shaping the plan for a great campaign. He would blockade, or besiege, both Almeida and Ciudad Rodrigo, and then march boldly into Spain and open communications with Valencia and the English army in Sicily, seizing Madrid, separating the French forces in the north and south of Spain, and organising a new base on the Mediterranean—a plan which, if successfully executed, "would have surpassed," says Napier, "Marlborough's march to Blenheim."

Affairs to the south, however, claimed attention. Beresford was managing his campaign badly. He had attempted a quite inadequate siege of Badajos, and become entangled in operations which, later, reached their climax in the dreadful fight at Albuera, with the result of wrecking Wellington's plan of carrying the war into Spain, and detaining the British army for more than a year on the Portuguese frontier.

Wellington, leaving Spencer in charge at headquarters, had come south, and was in Beresford's camp when he learned that Masséna was moving once more. He had been joined by two divisions of the 9th corps, and by Drouet with a force of 11,000 infantry and cavalry, and had marched with a huge convoy for Ciudad Rodrigo. Wellington instantly started, and, on the 28th, rode into the British headquarters, greatly to the joy of his troops, who, "would rather see his long nose in the fight," writes Kincaid, "than see a reinforcement of 10,000 men any day." To maintain the blockade of Almeida he must fight, and yet he had a force of only 33,000 men as against Masséna's 40,000, while the French counted 5000 cavalry against his weak brigades of a little over 1200. Wellington's position stretched for five miles betwixt the Turones and Duez Casas, a deep ravine covering his front. His right was weak, as a long stretch of level country lay open to the



Walker & Bentall sc.

French cavalry, and his line of retreat across the bridge of the Coa at Castello Bom might be seized. The 1st and 3rd Divisions were posted in, or near, the village of Fuentes d'Onoro.

The battle which followed stretched through two days, and in its course there were some moments of great peril for the British. On May 3, Loison made a resolute attack on Fuentes, which was held by five battalions of the 1st and 3rd Divisions. The French, in the fire of their rush, carried the lower parts of the village, but the British clung stubbornly to an old chapel and some houses on the high ground at the end of the little town. The village was built of granite with walls of the same material intersecting it in every direction. "As a result," says Major Simmons, with a curious choice of adjectives, "the contest became amusing and enlivening, and was supported on both sides with great bravery." The French, however, had an overwhelming superiority in numbers, and the British were hard pressed until the 24th, 71st, and 79th, coming up at the double, flung themselves into the fight, and drove the French through the village and over the stream beyond it.

Night brought respite, and the piquets of both armies mingled in very friendly fashion on the banks of a little stream of water which passed through the town. Says Simmons, in his "British Rifleman," "We gave some badly wounded French-

men to the picquet, and the officer allowed some of ours to be given up. The French officer said to me, 'This place is appropriately named the Fountain of Honour.' God knows how many of our friends on both sides have drunk deep of its waters, and with to-morrow's dawn most likely many more will do so. The remainder of the night," Simmons added, "was occupied in knocking down many an honest man's garden wall, and making a strong breastwork to fire over as soon as the day dawned." On the 4th Bessiéres joined Masséna with 1500 cavalry and a battery of the Imperial Guard, and the two French generals rode along the whole of the British front studying its position. The level country to the right was dangerously open to cavalry, but at a little distance was a rugged eminence commanding the roads leading to the bridges in the British rear; and Wellington for once yielding to advice—and to bad advice—had accepted Spencer's suggestion and extended his right wing so as to take in this hill, making his line of battle seven miles in length. A line so long, so open to attack, and so slenderly held, plainly offered great opportunities for attack.

On the 5th, the tempest of battle broke over the British. The village was again attacked with fresh fury. Drouet flung his regiments into the fight with such energy that the British were

driven from the lower town; two companies of the 79th were captured; Cameron, who commanded the regiment, was slain; and the hard-pressed British with difficulty held on to the craggy height on which stood the old chapel. But Masséna struck his heaviest blow at the British right. The whole of the 6th Corps, supported by nearly 5000 cavalry, crossed the Duez Casas, and broke through Wellington's line, cutting off the hill at the extremity. The British cavalry was overwhelmed; Ramsay's battery of horse artillery was cut off and disappeared amid the landscape of galloping horsemen. Here was a whole battery of British guns lost! Napier tells in matchless prose the incident which follows:

"A great commotion was observed in their main body; men and horses were seen to close with confusion and tumult towards one point, where a thick dust and loud cries, and the sparkling of blades, and flashing of pistols, indicated some extraordinary occurrence. Suddenly the multitude became violently agitated, an English shout pealed high and clear, the mass was rent asunder, and Norman Ramsay burst forth, sword in hand, at the head of his battery, his horses, breathing fire, stretched like greyhounds along the plain, the guns bounded behind them like things of no weight, and the mounted gunners followed close, with heads bent low and pointed weapons, in desperate career."[1]

A squadron of the 14th Dragoons, riding out, charged the pursuing French horse, and brought Ramsay in. General Charles Stewart, a better

[1] Napier, vol. iii. p. 150.

soldier than general, joined in the charge and took the French general, Lamotte, in combat. Norman Ramsay escaped, but the British cavalry were driven back, and the Light Division fell into squares in order to sustain the rush of the galloping horsemen.

Wellington's right wing was now in ruins; he must contract his front if the army was not to be destroyed. And yet, to draw back his scanty infantry across two miles of plain, over which 5000 French cavalry were riding in triumph, was a very perilous adventure. Houston, with the 7th Division, crossed the Turones and moved along the left bank to Freneda, while the Light Division, keeping to the other bank, fell back slowly over the plain in squares.

"There was not," says Napier, "during the whole war a more perilous hour." The two British divisions were parted by the Turones. The plain was covered with camp followers, baggage, country people, broken detachments, and stray piquets. Through all this confusion the squares of the Light Division moved, tiny quadrangles, edged with steel, that every now and again suddenly reddened with the angry flame of musketry fire. The French horse rode round the squares, and again and again attempted to charge them. But the grim human quadrangles kept on their steady march, and the French horse never dared to ride home. Loison might have broken up their march with his infantry, 6000 strong; and if

Montbrun's cavalry had ridden in upon them their escape would have been impossible. But Loison did not move. Craufurd's veterans were too steady and formidable to encourage attack. They got into touch with Houston's division again at Freneda, and Wellington's front was re-formed.

The fight still raged in the village, but Wellington was able to pour in reinforcements, and, when darkness fell, the unconquerable British still held the crag on which the chapel stood, while the French had sullenly withdrawn across the stream.

The night passed quietly. When morning broke Wellington was busy entrenching his position, while Masséna was sending his wounded to the rear. He made no movement to attack, but hung sullenly in Wellington's front, loth to retreat, but not daring to renew the fight. On the 8th his main body had fallen back, but his outposts were still in sight of the British lines.

Two days later he crossed the Agueda. His stroke had failed, his great army broke up, and Masséna was removed from his command. He was guilty of what was to Napoleon the unpardonable sin of not succeeding. In a campaign of nine months he had achieved nothing. The unconquerable British, instead of being driven to their ships, were on the Spanish frontier, and the whole structure of French power in Spain was shaken to its base. Masséna throughout the campaign had shown many of the

qualities of a great commander, but his genius was rebuked by that of a greater captain than himself.

It would be unfair to say that he had failed by his own fault. If Soult had carried out Napoleon's strategy, and struck at Lisbon while Wellington was pushing Masséna back at Celorico, the whole campaign might have been restored. If Bessiéres had brought his full strength up to Masséna's help there would have been 10,000 more good troops in the French line of battle at Fuentes. Wellington himself, writing of Fuentes, described it as "the most difficult fight I was ever concerned in, and against the greatest odds. We had very nearly three to one against us engaged, above four to one of cavalry; and moreover our men had not a gallop in them. . . . If Bony had been there, we should have been beaten."[1] But if Napoleon's generals had been loyal to each other the British army, even without Napoleon's presence, might have suffered a disastrous overthrow in that battle.

The news of the disappearance of Masséna, it is worth recording, was brought to Wellington in the early morning as he was shaving. "Ah," said Wellington, razor in hand, "gone are they? I thought they meant to be off. Very well"; and he concluded his shaving. Great success, like great peril, had no power to shake his iron coolness.

The campaign in the north closed with one dra-

[1] "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vii. p. 176.

matic incident. Almeida was practically abandoned to its fate by Masséna; but a French soldier contrived to get through the British lines and carry to its commander, Brennier, an order to evacuate the fortress. Brennier mined his principal bastions, destroyed his guns, by placing one across the muzzle of another, and firing several at once with heavy charges, so that the trick deceived the besiegers. At midnight on the 10th, he sprung his mines, broke out with his garrison in solid column, and passed through the besieging British with admirable coolness and skill. Some companies of British infantry hasily summoned hung upon his skirts for a time and pelted his rear-guard with volleys. But Brennier was a good soldier. He pushed on swiftly and in silence, escaped the forces clutching at him on either side, beat off the charges of some dragoons, and reached Reynier's corps.

It was a gallant feat, and as successful as gallant. It was in connection with this incident that Wellington wrote: "I begin to be of opinion that there is nothing so stupid as a gallant officer. They had about 13,000 men to watch 1400 . . . and they allowed the garrison to slip through their fingers and to escape. . . . There they were sleeping in their spurs even, but the French got off." [1]

The bridge by which Brennier reached Reynier should have been occupied by the 4th Regiment

[1] "Supplementary Despatches," vol. vii. p. 520.

under Colonel Bevan, but it was found unguarded. Erskine, who received the order, directing it to be occupied, did not send it to Bevan till ten hours after it had come to his hands. Bevan, stung beyond endurance by the shame which had fallen upon him, committed suicide; but the real fault was with Erskine.

Ten days after Fuentes d'Onoro, on May 16, Albuera was fought. No battle in the whole war reflected greater honour on the men in the ranks, or less honour on the general in command; and no battle, it may be added, had less justification in reason. Beresford, as far as personal courage was concerned, would have been in his proper place as a private among Cole's fusiliers. He could have stood in the hail of bullets as grimly, and charged the huge French columns as fiercely, as any one of them. But if he had the courage of a good soldier, he certainly had not the mind of a great general. He engaged in the fight without sufficient reason and fought it without intelligible plan. He won the fight, thanks to the energy of his chief of staff, Colonel Hardinge, and to the amazing courage of his infantry, but he won it at a cost of 7000 men. "With smaller loss," says Napier, "Wellington had fought two great battles and several minor actions; had baffled Masséna, and turned 70,000 men out of Portugal." Defeat at Albuera would have shattered British policy in Spain; victory practically achieved

nothing, except perhaps to stamp on the imagination of French soldiers a long-enduring respect for the fighting quality of the stubborn British infantry. Wellington's summary of Albuera is amusing:

"The battle of Albuera," he wrote, "was a strange concern. They were never determined to fight it; they did not occupy the ground as they ought; they were ready to run away at every moment from the time it commenced till the French retired; and, if it had not been for me, who am now suffering from the loss and disorganisation caused by that battle, they would have written a whining report upon it, which would have driven the people in England mad. However I prevented that."[1]

Nothing, indeed, shows the value of Wellington to the British cause, as a commander, than the state of affairs at this exact moment. Spencer in command in the north, and Beresford in the south, were no match for French generalship. Says Charles Napier, "... Take Lord Wellington away and we are general-less. ... When Lord Wellington is in the south, we in the north grow frightened lest the French should advance; when he is here, things go wrong in the south. He has to fly backwards and forwards ... and does the journey in five days. Hard work this for body and mind."

[1] "Supplementary Despatches," vol. viii. p. 478.

END OF VOL. I.

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